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AUTHOR Snelbecker, Karen Amy
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ABSTRACT

A survey of gay, Lesbian, and bisexual teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) concerning their roles as teachers, working conditions, and peer relationships is reported. Data were gathered from 17 written questionnaires and 13 telephone interviews. An introductory chapter gives a brief history of the organization of homosexual members of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and an overview of the study's design. Chapter 2 analyzes responses concerning work issues outside the classroom: hostile or supportive organizational climate; coming out to colleagues; hiding at work; administrator attitudes; institutional policies and benefits; homophobia and career decisions; and other forms of oppression. Chapter 3 looks at issues associated with "coming out" to students, including both positive and negative experiences and support of individual homosexual/bisexual students. In chapter 4, special contributions that homosexual/bisexual teachers can make are then examined, including understanding and sensitivity, incorporation of homosexual/bisexual course content, and changes within the profession. A final chapter summarizes findings and conclusions about what homosexual/bisexual teachers want in order to be effective teachers and offers recommendations for the profession. Appended materials include the questionnaire, a summary of data, examples of school board and organizational policies supportive of homosexuals/bisexuals, and lists of references and relevant resources. (MSE)

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ED 375 680

Speaking Out: A Survey of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Teachers of ESOL in the U.S.

Karen Amy Snelbecker

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

June 23, 1994

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This project by Karen Amy Snelbecker is accepted in its present form.

Date: June 2, 1994

Project Advisor: Alex Siegman

Project Reader: Lisa M Cavaiola

To my compañeros, queer teachers in TESOL,
past, present and future

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The support of many people has made this project possible. I am grateful to the respondents who shared their stories, information and insights with me.

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Woody provided transportation at a crucial point (sorry the car died).

Lastly, Moss has been an unfailing source of support, picked up the slack at home, saw that I was fed regularly, put up with my neuroses, edited my writing and loved me absolutely. (I know, it's my turn to do the dishes for the next three months.)

ABSTRACT

This project is based on a survey and interviews of gay, lesbian and bisexual TESOL professionals in the U.S. Most are ESL teachers; a few are EFL teachers, teacher trainers, or international student advisors. I examine the following issues: different levels of homophobia in the work places of these individuals; how this homophobia detracts from their ability to teach as "whole" people; their decisions about and strategies for coming out to colleagues and students; and how they use their sexual identities to be more effective language teachers, including creating course content that is inclusive of queer issues. I explore both the benefits and possible negative consequences of coming out and including queer content. Based on my research, I recommend changes that could be made by individuals, institutions and the profession to better support and include queer teachers and students. Included are the survey, examples of queer-inclusive policies, and a resource list.

ERIC Descriptors:

English (second language)
gay
lesbian
bisexual
teacher effectiveness
teaching conditions
curriculum
survey

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The Lesbian creates a false self, a facade or front, which she interposes between herself and the world. Only her lover and a few close friends may see herself as an integrated being....[This concealment] uses psychic energies that should find more positive and creative expression. It diverts energy into building and rebuilding defenses against the threat of discovery, a threat that will never cease to exist. The outer self acts as a filter, a censor that examines all incoming and outgoing messages for threats. It is like thinking in one language and talking in another.

--Sappho was a Right-On Woman, 1972[1]

The cost of self-censoring, filtering, whatever you want to call it, is almost like a literal, continuous out-of-the-body experience, of judging oneself: am I being too flamboyant, do I talk too loud, do I use my hands too much? Is my face too expressive, do I use the wrong adjectives? That takes a tremendous cost in terms of energy, literal energy, psychic energy.

For me, I think drawing a line between our personal lives and our professional lives is an artificial distinction. I think people who are truly whole bring all of themselves into their personal life and all of themselves into their professional life....I mean hopefully you don't bring all of your problems home and burden your partner with them, and...you're not inappropriate in the classroom about the details of your personal life. But you can be...all of who you are in both places.

--Gay teacher, interviewed 1994[2]

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[1] Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism (New York: Stein and Day, 1972; Paperback Edition 1978), 65.

[2] Respondent #10, telephone interview by author, tape recording, February 9, 1994, Philadelphia.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I am a bisexual teacher. I think that I have always wanted to be a teacher, but when I came out as bisexual six years ago, I decided that I couldn't be both queer[1] and a teacher. Teachers are expected to be morally upstanding, to be a role model for their students, and at the very minimum to be heterosexual. If they are unlucky enough to not have the "normal" sexual orientation, then they are expected to stay deeply in the closet so they won't "influence" their students in the "wrong" way. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)[2] face the added burden of being expected to represent, in some ways, the culture of their country (the U.S. in my case). We deal with students from all over the world, whose cultures, it is often assumed, are so homophobic that the students couldn't be expected to accept a queer teacher. It would be "embarrassing" to our country and our students if we came out. So the common reasoning goes, and so I believed.

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[1] I use the term "queer" throughout this paper to mean gay, lesbian or bisexual. (Normally I would include transgendered also, but in this case I did not have any respondents who identified as such.) I realize that this is a politically loaded term that is offensive to some, and that many gay, lesbian, bi and transgendered people do not identify as "queer." However, I identify as queer and I use it as a convenient and inclusive term that has only positive connotations for me. I ask readers who are offended to suspend their offense and look upon it as a practical term for my purposes.

[2] I use the term "ESOL" as an umbrella term that includes both ESL--English as a second language (taught in countries where English is a main language), and EFL--English as a foreign language (taught in countries where English is not a main language).

But I wanted to teach ESOL, and I didn't want to have to be in the closet to do it. I therefore began a quest, while learning my trade of teaching English, to see how I could integrate my new career with a fundamental part of my being, my sexual identity. Is it possible to be a happy, well-adjusted, honest and open bisexual and at the same time be a caring, culturally sensitive, professional and effective teacher of ESOL? I embarked on a mission to survey and interview other queer teachers of ESOL. I chose to focus on ESL teachers in the U.S., since I wanted to compare their experiences within a common culture, and for practical reasons. This focus necessarily limits the applicability of my findings to other cultures.

I asked teachers about the following: What are their experiences with homophobia in TESOL? What decisions do they make and what strategies do they have for coming out to colleagues and students? In what ways do they think that their sexual orientation contributes to their teaching ability? How do they handle issues of sexual orientation and heterosexism in the classroom? What kind of changes in their teaching environments would enable them to fully integrate their professional and personal lives? In short, how do they manage to be whole teachers and people in a profession that demands that they hide their sexuality and cultural identities as queers?

A Brief History of Queer Organizing in TESOL

Teachers of ESOL are still faced with the same basic issues as "the Lesbian" of 1972 (in the opening quotation). The assumption of heterosexuality puts us in the closet and forces us to decide when and where to come out. We lack the protection against job discrimination that is guaranteed to our straight colleagues: it is still legal in most places to fire people based on their sexual orientation. What is perhaps most psychologically harmful is the overwhelming silence about sexual orientation differences and queer culture in our profession. Individual queer ESOL teachers deal with these issues daily, and some have made progress toward obtaining rights and recognition.[3]

However, as a group, gay, lesbian and bisexual members of TESOL (the professional organization) have only begun organizing at the national level within the past few years to address their issues. An informal meeting of bisexuals, lesbians and gays was held at the national TESOL conference in 1991 to discuss how to address heterosexism within the field of TESOL. Participants planned proposals for the following year's conference and decided to create a formal committee to address their concerns. At the Vancouver conference in 1992, Lisa Carscadden, Cynthia Nelson and Jim Ward presented TESOL's first colloquium to deal with gay/lesbian issues, entitled "We Are Your Colleagues: Gays and Lesbians in ESL." Met with a large and enthusiastic audience, they followed up with a successful presentation in Atlanta the next year. At the 1994 conference in

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[3] For example, I found an article published in 1981 that addressed the concerns of gay and lesbian EFL teachers: Alex Hirst, "Gay's the Word, but Not in EFL," EFL Gazette 28 (Nov./Dec. 1981): 35.

Baltimore, there were three presentations about queer issues. More are being proposed for the 1995 conference, and presenters are attempting to coordinate efforts to maximize the coverage of queer issues.

After negotiations within the national organization, the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force of TESOL was formed in 1992, as a part of the executive committee. (The Task Force's name was recently changed to include bisexuals.) Its first newsletter was published in 1992. Currently, the Task Force's projects include establishing a more permanent structure for itself (task forces are intended to be temporary); proposing a non-discrimination statement to the TESOL Executive Board; submitting articles about heterosexism to TESOL publications; encouraging textbook publishers to be more inclusive of queer issues; and supporting presenters of relevant topics at TESOL conferences.[4] Some of the people who responded to my survey have been involved in this organizing or received support from it, and some have not been involved at all.

Research Method

My research method was almost entirely qualitative. My primary method of data collection was written surveys and telephone interviews. I solicited participants through personal contacts and by word of mouth, and with an advertisement in the GLESOL Newsletter (of the Gay/Lesbian/Bi Task Force of TESOL). I sent out about fifty written surveys (see appendix one for the

[4] Elisa Shore, ed., GLESOL Newsletter 1 no. 1 (Jun. 1992). Jan Smith, ed. GLESOL Newsletter 1 no. 2 (Jan. 1994).

complete survey). Seventeen people returned the surveys, and I interviewed two more people who never filled out the survey. My questions in the survey and interviews were mostly open-ended, so that I could elicit as much information as possible. In the survey, I asked for volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed by telephone as well. I chose eleven of these respondents to interview, based on whether I had more questions about their responses, and the practicality of being able to track them down by telephone. I interviewed thirteen people from a total group of nineteen.

In the interviews, I asked participants to expand on some of their answers from the survey, and to add whatever else came to mind. This method elicited more in-depth answers than were given on the surveys. For the two who never completed a survey, I asked questions directly from the survey. I interviewed both of them in person simultaneously, since they happened to be visiting Philadelphia at the time. One respondent agreed to answer more in depth but did not want to be interviewed over the phone, so I sent her written questions, which she responded to at length in writing. I interviewed each person once for a period of a half hour to an hour, depending on how much they had to say. I tape recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them with rough notes. I then went back and transcribed verbatim those parts of the interviews I chose to quote. It took about seven months from the time I distributed the surveys to the time I completed the last interview.

In my interviews, I walked a fine line between keeping the respondents from straying too far from the topic and allowing room for viewpoints and issues that I had not considered. What they said was determined to some degree by which questions I asked them: which responses to their surveys I wanted more information about, and which I considered adequately answered or uninteresting. I tried not to state my opinions about the questions I asked, and to be nonjudgmental about the decisions of my interviewees. This proved to be crucial, because many of them seemed to feel guilty about not being "out enough" or about the way they handled sexual orientation in the classroom. These surveys and interviews gave me a wealth of descriptive data.

Since this data is almost entirely self-reported, and because I guaranteed my participants absolute anonymity, it would be difficult to "triangulate" the data with observation.[5] In lieu of direct observation, I collected various presentation handouts and articles about issues faced by queer ESOL teachers, including personal accounts of coming out to students; I read the GLESOL Newsletter (which I subscribe to); and I attended the three presentations with queer themes at the 1994 TESOL conference. These other sources of data were useful for comparing to the statements of my respondents. Finally, I used the surveys to provide a quantitative picture of my sample, by tabulating demographic information and responses to questions that could be quantified, such as the number who answered yes or no to a particular question. This gave me an overall

[5] David F. Lancy, Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to the Major Traditions (New York: Longman, 1993), 20.

view of the degree to which my sample was diverse in terms of demographics, geography and teaching experience. It also allowed me to establish general patterns of responses to questions, such as the fact that all of my respondents reported being out to at least some colleagues.

In analyzing my data, I chose to look at both the most common responses, and the range of difference within the group. In this way, I hope to present both the patterns that I see and the opinions that diverge from these patterns. Hopefully this will circumvent the trap of forcing the data to fit into my preconceived ideas. A researcher of life histories presented a paper about the difficulties of telling the subject's story without molding it to the researcher's theories:

> "I questioned whether it was truly the life historian's understanding of her experience I was seeking, or if I was structuring the interview so that the subject told the story that conformed to my outlook."[6]

By quoting extensively and presenting diverse viewpoints, I hope to accurately represent the respondents' opinions.

Another issue in the analysis of my data is the extent to which I can make generalizations about it. Since the sample (see next section) is small and respondents were contacted chiefly through word of mouth, I think that they are probably skewed toward the "more out" side of the spectrum. In contrast, I imagine that the majority of queer ESOL teachers are not out to many people.

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[6] P. Munro, "Multiple 'Is': Dilemmas of Life History Research," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago, April 1991, quoted in Lancy, Qualitative Research, 199.

Nonetheless, my respondents deal with most of the same issues that all queer teachers deal with. They are perhaps just more outspoken about their concerns and take a more active stance in addressing those concerns. In addition, the respondents are almost entirely Caucasian. Therefore, I will avoid making generalizations about the effects of racism on queer teachers of color.

I had hoped to look more extensively at the effects of the combination of homophobia with other oppressions. However, I lack much input from queer teachers of color about how they experience racism and homophobia. On the other hand, some white respondents did talk about the interaction of racism and homophobia in their work places, and some of the Jewish respondents talked about dealing with anti-Semitism plus homophobia. I have also included the perspective of a lesbian (not in the study) who wrote about how sexism and homophobia make lesbians extremely isolated. In addition, a few teachers talked about how classism affected their experiences with homophobia. In the work environments of these respondents, homophobia interacted in complex ways with other types of oppression.

Finally, in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, I will sometimes be vague about characteristics that could identify them, such as location, type of job, etc. Hopefully this will not blur the specificity and compromise the validity of their responses.

Given these limitations, my data still presents a picture of how these teachers view their teaching in relation to their sexual orientation, and what they

feel their struggles and achievements are as gays, lesbians and bisexuals in TESOL. They have allowed me and readers to "walk a mile in their heads."[7] Their comments should serve to point colleagues in a new direction, towards changes that need to be made in this profession to affirm and support queer teachers and students, and to deal with the too-often silenced issues of sexuality and oppressed cultures in the U.S.

Sample[8]

My sample of nineteen respondents represented a range of sexual orientations, gender, age, geography, teaching experience and degree of "outness." There were ten men and nine women; all of the men identified as gay, and of the women, four identified as lesbian, three as bisexual, and two as bisexual and lesbian. The oldest respondent was fifty-one and the youngest was twenty-three. The respondents were also geographically dispersed in clusters, with eighteen currently in the U.S. and one in South America. One was in the Midwest but wrote about her experiences in Eastern Europe teaching EFL and in the Midwest teaching non-ESL subjects. Most respondents worked in big cities, with a few in towns and one in a small city.

There was also a range of teaching experience, both in terms of number of years teaching and type of position. Fifteen of the respondents were currently

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[7] Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Interviewing" in Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 357.

[8] For a more complete summary of data from the sample, see appendix two.

teaching, and four were not (some respondents wrote about past teaching experiences). The longest length of time a respondent had worked in TESOL was thirty-one years, and the shortest was less than a year. The length of time at a job (current or most recent) ranged from three weeks to twenty-five years. Both veterans of teaching and beginners were represented.

Respondents represented a range of types of teaching institutions, with several of them working at more than one type of school. In the U.S., they worked at universities/four-year colleges, community colleges, public schools (one elementary and two high-school), private secondary boarding schools, a community center, and a technical institute. The two outside of the U.S. worked in private institutions.

In addition to the teaching environment, respondents held a range of types of positions. Nine respondents had full-time jobs, eight had part-time jobs, and two had both. Although I did not specifically ask, most of the part-time workers mentioned having two or more jobs (which points to the scarcity of full-time jobs in TESOL). One was a counselor/advisor for ESL students in addition to teaching some classes. Two were teacher educators. One directed a federal program in addition to teaching. All of the rest taught ESL, except for the two outside the U.S., who taught EFL. I asked what specific subject matter they taught. Ten did not answer or said they taught "all skills" or "the four skills." Other specific topics mentioned included culture and communication, grammar, poetry, writing, speaking and life skills.

Finally, respondents represented a range of degree of "outness": who and how many people they were out to on the job. They all reported being out to at least some colleagues. Nine reported being out to all colleagues, either because they told everybody or they thought that everybody probably knew because "word gets around." Ten reported being out to administrators, some of whom were queer and some straight. Fewer were out to their students. Six were not out to any students, four were out only to certain individual students, six were out only to certain classes, and three were out to all of their classes. Even those who thought they were out to everybody, however, reported that they had to continually come out to new students and colleagues who assumed them to be heterosexual.

Because of the nature of this project, it would not be possible to select a random sample. Since most of the respondents to the survey were selected by word of mouth, they may represent a certain subset: teachers who are out to at least a few people, and who are somewhat involved in networks (formal or informal) of queer ESOL teachers. It is important to realize that for every teacher who is out to some degree, there are many more in the closet. Therefore, we must rely on those who are out enough to tell their stories, to speak for those who are not. Since most people who are out now were in the closet at some time, they can speak with authority about the experience of being in the closet.

The two areas where my sample was not diverse were the lack of transgendered people and the scarcity of people of color. I attempted to include

transgendered teachers (transsexuals and cross-dressers) by naming "transsexual" as a category one could identify as and asking for gender with a blank space instead of "m/f", but none of my respondents openly identified as transgendered. Therefore I cannot draw any conclusions about the experiences of transgendered teachers of ESOL. Either transgendered teachers of ESOL are more deeply in the closet than gays, lesbians and bisexuals, or I just did not reach them. My guess would be that transgendered teachers face an even more painful situation, since they seem to be less approved-of and understood in general in U.S. culture than gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

My sample was also almost entirely white/Caucasian, with only one respondent identifying as mixed European, African and Native American. I had hoped to include the perspectives of more people of color. I have several ideas about why more people of color did not respond to my survey. Perhaps because I relied on mostly word of mouth, and people tend to be friends with those of similar backgrounds, I did not reach more people of color. Or perhaps teachers of ESOL in the U.S. are disproportionately white. It's also possible that people of color who heard about my survey either didn't think that their sexual orientation was a defining characteristic of their experience (as compared to race), or that they felt that the risk of coming out in addition to dealing with racism was too great. Maybe because I am white, they did not feel that I would adequately deal with issues of race. In any case, more research needs to be done about the specific needs of queer ESOL teachers of color.

Within the European category, my sample was ethnically diverse. Three respondents identified as Jewish, and one as Jewish and Italian. Four identified their origins as German, one as English, one as Irish, one as Polish/German, one as Irish/German, and one as European/Native American/African. The rest were of non-specific European origin, including one "WASP," one "trash" and one "former Protestant, now Pagan." The latter two identities were attempts to assert class and religious background, which I did not ask about and, I realize now, should have. My sample is mostly European and white then, with a fair representation of Jews, and one person of color of mixed identities.

A survey with a much larger sample would perhaps present different conclusions about the experiences of most queer ESOL teachers.

My Position As Researcher

It is important to look at the position that I take as a researcher.[9] My role in this project is a sort of hybrid. In some ways, I am a participant-observer because I am participating as a teacher of ESOL, and the teachers are my peers: I am also a queer teacher. I definitely was a participant-observer in the TESOL presentations I attended. On the other hand, I am not involved in the everyday teaching lives of those who answered my survey, although I know some as colleagues. I think a good description of my role would be a "peer interviewer."

[9] Lancy, Qualitative Research, 153.

My position as a "peer interviewer" allowed me a unique vantage point. I was granted almost immediate trust: respondents, especially the ones I interviewed, told me deeply personal stories, some of which could be potentially embarrassing to them. I think that because I identified myself as bisexual, the respondents felt that I would give a fair treatment of their issues, and that I would bring an understanding and empathy to the study that a straight person could not. In addition, I was adamant about maintaining respondents' anonymity, and allowed them various levels of confidentiality. I do not even know some of their names. Many of them went out of their way to provide me with additional information, expressed interest in reading my thesis, and asked how they could be of further assistance. Almost all of them thanked me for doing this work: clearly they recognize the need for their stories to be told and for their issues to be dealt with.

As a feminist, I do not believe that it is possible to be an "objective" researcher. Some would accuse me of having an "agenda" because I am bisexual. My agenda is that I would like conditions to improve for myself and other queer teachers in my field. I would argue that heterosexuals would simply have a different bias than me, and perhaps have less understanding of the issues that queer teachers face.

Assumptions and Hypotheses

I had several working hypotheses and assumptions in this project. My assumptions were based upon my belief that lesbians, bisexuals, gays and transgendered people have the same rights as everyone else. Therefore, we should have the right to be open about who we are, just as heterosexuals are (although the decision to come out should be left to each individual). We should be protected against discrimination based on our sexual orientation or gender identity. We should also have the same benefits as our heterosexual colleagues, such as spousal health insurance and access to family housing. Another major assumption is that our sexuality is an integral part of ourselves: it cannot be separated from the rest of us (although I realize that some queers would disagree with this). I believe that "queerness" entails not only sexual orientation, but also for many a cultural identity and a shared history. Finally, I believe that being queer is a positive thing, and that queers have unique contributions to make to the art of teaching ESOL and to their students. Again, some queers would disagree with this; I would argue that internalized homophobia makes them devalue themselves in this way.

I had several working hypotheses when I began this project. I thought that I would hear a lot of horror stories about job discrimination, harassment and even violence against my respondents. Instead, most of the stories of homophobia were more subtle, about the pain of silence and invisibility. I also expected that some respondents would not be out to any colleagues, that most would be out to some

colleagues, and that very few would be out to students. In fact, all of the respondents were out to at least some colleagues, and more than I predicted were out to their students as well. Most of the ones who were out to students reported positive reactions, with some negative consequences. Most of those who were not out to students expressed their wish to be able to be honest with their students. Another hypothesis I had was that the career decisions of most teachers would be affected by homophobia, that they would seek employment in the least homophobic environment possible. This turned out to be the case only for a few teachers: most did not cite homophobia as a deciding factor, and some made decisions in spite of blatant homophobia. The two most salient issues seemed to be struggles with coming out and feeling silenced.

In addition to the oppression of queer ESOL teachers, I looked at the ways in which they saw their sexual orientation as making a positive contribution to their teaching ability. I predicted that most teachers would think that their sexual orientation made them more sensitive to their students' positions as outsiders in U.S. culture; this perception was held by all but one respondent. I also thought that most of these teachers would bring up sexual orientation in some way in the classroom, whether or not they came out personally, and this was true for many of the respondents. They described a range of creative means of addressing homophobia and sexual orientation, from very overt to very subtle. Finally, I predicted that most teachers would have suggestions for ways in which their teaching environments could be changed so that they could be more comfortable

and effective. Some seemed to be happy with their current conditions, but most proposed changes, to be made either by their institutions or by themselves personally in the classroom. There was an almost unanimous agreement that TESOL as a profession must somehow deal with issues of homophobia and queer culture, and be more supportive of queer teachers and students.

CHAPTER TWO

WORK ISSUES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Before we look at the particular aspects of homophobia that ESOL teachers face in their work places, we must put their experiences into a larger context of the heterosexism that exists throughout society. Heterosexism is manifested in invisibility of queers, a lack of equal civil rights, relationships that are not legally recognized, political movements to outlaw even the mention of queer issues, and a rise in homophobic violence. In addition to the oppression that queers share, many of us participate in various aspects of queer culture. This diverse culture, often not acknowledged by heterosexuals, includes social activities, music, literature, holidays, political organizations, media, fashion, theater, film, humor, jargon, etc., and is both an entity unto itself and interwoven with heterosexual cultures.

Cynthia Nelson, in a transcription of her "We Are Your Colleagues" speech, describes why queer ESOL teachers cannot simply forget our oppression and our cultural identities at work:

> Gay people who happen to teach ESL are not able to walk away from this reality when we enter the office or classroom. It's not like checking a coat at the door. When we cross that threshold, we shed neither our own life experiences nor our collective history. When we cross that threshold, neither are we handed our civil rights. We don't leave behind our cultural identities either....Because of

> heterosexism, those of us who are involved in gay culture often feel we must hide any expression of that culture.[1]

Gay, lesbian and bisexual ESOL teachers face several issues in their work places that heterosexual teachers don't have to think about. In general, people are assumed to be heterosexual unless they say otherwise. This presents the dilemma of whether or not to come out (tell people you are not heterosexual), whom to tell, how to tell them, and what the consequences will be. Consequences may include harassment and losing one's job based on one's sexual orientation. The friendliness or hostility of an institution is determined to a large extent by the attitudes of its administrators. On another level, an institution's policies may protect queers against discrimination, but most do not. Another major issue is that people in same-sex couples are usually not granted the same benefits as heterosexually married couples, such as health insurance, family housing, and discounts on tuition. Homophobia affects the career decisions of some queer ESOL teachers. They may try to find work at an institution that is not too homophobic, choose an area of the country that is more accepting, or take jobs despite the homophobia they will face. In addition to homophobia, a climate of racism, sexism and anti-Semitism may contribute to the silencing of teachers who face multiple forms of oppression. The teachers I interviewed and surveyed struggled with many of these issues.

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[1] Cynthia Nelson, "Heterosexism in ESL: Examining Our Attitudes," TESOL Quarterly 27 no. 1 (Spring 1993): 144.

Work Place Climate: Hostile or Supportive?

The respondents of my survey reported a variety of climates at their work places, ranging from extremely supportive to indifferent to extremely hostile. Most fell into the category of indifference. The climate of a work place for a queer teacher is shaped by several factors, including attitudes of coworkers, clerical and other staff, and administrators; textbooks and curricula used; official policies about discrimination and benefits; and local laws. Homophobia can be subtle or overt, and encompasses ignorance, harassment, discrimination and violence. The overriding issue for respondents was acknowledgement versus silence: were they, as queer teachers, recognized as a vital part of their institutions, or was there an overwhelming silence about the issue of sexual orientation, which kept them in the closet?

One teacher reported a great deal of support from his heterosexual colleagues. He was even surprised by the extent to which they were willing to speak out for queer rights: almost all of them attended the March On Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Equal rights (they worked close to D.C.). He felt extremely affirmed by their participation:

> I was surprised. It was like, I didn't organize this, I didn't tell them. I just knew I was going, and I figured they had plans of their own. And everyone had a red neck--that was the giveaway. I was asking them, and I felt so affirmed....I mean I know they accepted me, but they went for their own reasons. They didn't go to support me. I guess it also just told me that their concerns about issues of peace and social justice are real and widespread. It's not just about race issues or poverty issues: it's also about equality....I was just so taken

> aback and so surprised and so pleased....It reaffirms too that... diversity is about <u>all</u> of us.[2]

This level of support is uncommon: the farthest that most heterosexual colleagues of respondents would go was to accept them as people, but not to connect their issues to a larger political struggle, and to participate in this movement.

In contrast, silence about sexual orientation and the assumption of heterosexuality seem to be the most pervasive issues for the other people I surveyed. In some ways, this silence and the ubiquitousness of heterosexuality is the most painful form of homophobia, because it says to queers, "you do not exist, you are not valid, do not speak about yourself." Heterosexuals take for granted their rights to speak about themselves and to see themselves represented wherever they go (in textbooks, on television, etc.). One lesbian said:

> I haven't heard a lot of homophobic jokes said in the teachers' room, but I have had this assumption of heterosexuality....I feel like I have to come out sometimes because I can't stand hearing "my husband this. My husband brought me this." [*whining*] And I don't talk about [my girlfriend] all the time like that. It feels like straight women constantly must say "My husband this" just so they have an existence or something. So I'll say "oh, my girlfriend and I are going to do this,"...and some of them, they don't know what to do. They kind of look at me, but they figure it out really quick...I just want them to know that yes I actually do have somebody. "My husband this"--ugh! That's one of the things that really gets on my nerves.[3]

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[2] Respondent #10, interview.

[3] Respondent #1A, Interview by author, tape recording, Nov. 24, 1993, Philadelphia. (I will refer to the two people interviewed at this time as 1A and 1B. Note that neither filled out a survey.)

She finds it grating to hear heterosexuals rave about their "lifestyles" when her own relationships are not accepted, and her lesbian identity is made invisible by the assumption of heterosexuality.

Sometimes this assumption can be extremely uncomfortable. One teacher reported that a friend and coworker, a Japanese woman with whom he worked in a program outside of his university, hounded him about not being married:

> We were sitting at a table there with several other...teachers who knew I was gay, so it was even embarrassing for them too. And then she was quite persistent in asking this question. I think it's because she likes me, and...[she thinks]: "you seem to be a good person. The one thing I can't understand is why a good person like you isn't married."[4]

He chose not to come out to her for two reasons: because it would have embarrassed her (she would have lost face) and because it may have endangered his job at the university. Even well-intentioned teasing from a friend and colleague can reinforce the silencing that sexual minorities face and put them in a position of either lying to close friends or risking losing their jobs. This is the decision that queer teachers must make every day: whether or not to come out.

Coming Out to Colleagues

To come out or not to come out: that is the dilemma. In the dominant culture of this country, we are usually assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise. Because they are "the norm," heterosexuals take for granted the fact

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[4] Respondent #11, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Mar. 25, 1994, Philadelphia.

that they can talk about lovers and spouses, social events and families in casual conversations with colleagues. Queers, however, must weigh the possible consequences of coming out to each person. They may be accused of "flaunting it" if they do talk about being queer, or being "unfriendly" if they avoid talking about their personal lives. They may be forced to either lie and hide, or, if they do come out, face being ostracized, harassed or fired. In some cases, they may even face physical violence.

When asked how they felt about coming out at work (aside from the classroom, which I will deal with in chapter three), seven of the people I surveyed expressed very positive feelings about it and said they had come out to most or all of their colleagues; six were positive but more cautious; and the remaining six were reluctant to come out for various reasons. The most positive comments included: "I feel empowered. I know that other people's handling of it is not my problem;" and "Generally good. I never liked living a lie, but I also like to be accepted. To me it's more important to not live a lie than to be accepted." The mixed comments included:

> Sometimes I feel it's none of their business what I do in my private life, but other times it angers me that they can talk about their private lives freely...that's when I come out....Sometimes I worry about discrimination.

Other teachers were reluctant to come out to colleagues, either because they were afraid or because they did not feel it was necessary: "nervous, you never can tell when someone will freak. I like them to get to know me first;" "I feel that because of my boss's attitudes...I must be very careful at work;" "It's too big a

risk....Other teachers could also turn on me. (That happened in another job...);" and "I feel no need to come out to the public. I only care about the people I care about." One woman in her twenties predicted that she would come out more as she got more experience: "I like to feel out the situation and people first. I suspect I will need to be out more and more as I get older." Many teachers spoke about their conflict between wanting to come out to coworkers, and feeling afraid.[5]

All of the people who responded to my survey were out to at least some colleagues. I had thought that more of them would not be out to anyone at work, but in retrospect I realize that they probably wouldn't have received the survey if none of their queer colleagues knew about them. Of the ten respondents who were out to just some of their coworkers, three mentioned being out to only coworkers who were queer, two were out only to straight colleagues (i.e., they knew of no queer colleagues), and five were out to some queer and some straight coworkers.

Coming Out to Queer Colleagues

Coming out to other queer colleagues seemed to represent less of a risk for some respondents than coming out to straight people. Some teachers used the strategy of coming out to other queer teachers once those teachers had come out

[5] Respondent #10, survey, p. 3. Respondent #14, survey, p. 3. Respondent #5, survey, p. 3. Respondent #6, survey, p. 3. Respondent #2, survey, p. 3. Respondent #16, survey, p. 3. Respondent #13, survey, p. 3. Respondent #9, survey, p. 3.

to them. One bisexual woman who used this strategy said "they reacted as I had--that the news was ordinary everyday stuff." Another teacher came out to a colleague after this colleague mentioned a student who was "different." Once the teacher came out, her colleague also came out, as "probably bisexual." Thus when one teacher comes out, it often makes it safer for others to do so.[6]

Many of those who came out to other queer teachers encountered supportive responses. One woman felt support from her queer colleagues because "they...share activities and include me in projects related to the topic." Another, who was out to almost all colleagues, said "it is often more comforting to talk to other queer teachers [than straight teachers]." These queer teachers benefitted from connecting with others like themselves who share their experiences.[7]

However, despite the relatively low risk involved in coming out to a queer colleague, one teacher at a small, close-knit private school was still reluctant:

> I'm in the process of coming out to the campus therapist, and another good friend who is also a teacher, suspects me, and is also homosexual (I suspect)....Based on the two individuals I have in mind, I do not think that their reactions would be anything out of the ordinary. However, based on traumatic past experience, I absolutely refuse to take that risk....I want and desperately need support. It's that intimidating risk that seems to be getting in my way. I'm stagnant and in the closet because of it. I feel quite isolated.[8]

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[6] Respondent #6, survey, p. 2. Respondent #9, survey, p. 2.

[7] Respondent #6, survey, p. 5. Respondent #5, survey, p. 5.

[8] Respondent #3, survey, p. 2.

Between the time that he completed the survey and the time I interviewed him, this teacher actually did take the risk and came out to the friend he suspected to be gay.

He made this decision because he was "to the point where I don't want people to not know me for who I am, because I'm misrepresenting myself." When the friend said that he was concerned about this teacher and wanted the teacher to tell him about himself (in a general way), the teacher responded by coming out to the friend. He gave him a paper he had written about his life story and sexuality. The friend's response was positive:

> He had come over...and just acted absolutely the same. A week after that, he had started asking me questions....It felt great. We've been doing lots of things together....I felt so good. Now he's trying to get me to do the same with our other close...friends. I'm not sure. I'm thinking that I might.

Despite this positive reaction, however, the experience was still traumatic. Because of his past negative experiences with coming out, this teacher wants more security before he is willing to do so further:

> I have to be absolutely sure that I'm not going to get left out, ...thrown out, or cheated out of a friend because of who I am. That's real important to me. I don't know if there's a way for me to assure myself of that....I don't know if it would be better for me just to come on like I am, and not misrepresent myself from the beginning, or to have people really get to know me, and then lay this on them....It's a very, very, very big risk....I fear losing out. I took the risk with this person and it was all right, but it took a lot out of me.

This teacher wants both a more explicitly supportive atmosphere and help with strategies for coming out to colleagues.[9]

Coming Out to a Mixed Crowd

Most people I surveyed were out to both heterosexual and queer colleagues. The responses varied, depending on the number of other queer coworkers who were out and the attitudes of the individuals they came out to. Having a large number of queer colleagues seemed to make people more confident and comfortable. As one lesbian said:

> As far as coming out at work, in fact I told people I'm going to go visit my girlfriend's folks, and they don't care. There's nothing to be said about it. They dare not. They don't say anything. Not this particular campus. Nobody would, because there's too many gay people running around.

Another teacher spoke wistfully of the school where he taught EFL in Spain, where about half of the male teachers were gay:

> I don't know if this was an exception or what, but I felt extremely comfortable in that atmosphere because most everybody at the school was very, if not supportive, at least they didn't try to do anything against the gay people.

There is safety in numbers: a critical mass of queers seems to provide a buffer against homophobia for these teachers.[10]

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[9] Respondent #3, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Dec. 23, 1994, Philadelphia.

[10] Respondent #1B, interview. Respondent #8, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Feb. 5, 1994, Philadelphia.

Some respondents had no queer colleagues (as far as they knew), and therefore could not count on support from other queers. However, straight coworkers who talked comfortably about queers provided a safe space for queer teachers to come out to them. For example, one woman who was teaching in South America said:

> [A coworker] was talking about lesbian and gay friends of hers in the States, so I could tell her about myself. My partner had worked with her for six months prior to that time....She was very supportive and consistently continued to be supportive. She treated us as she would treat a straight couple.

This one colleague's support, however, was offset by the hostility of the other heterosexual teachers:

> Other teachers were suspicious (as though we were doing something wrong) and some tried to trick me into "admitting" that I was a lesbian. They would also have openly homophobic conversations when I was around and watch to see my reaction or try to get me to join.

Even if some coworkers are accepting, others can make a work place climate viciously homophobic.[11]

Most respondents who came out to both heterosexual and queer colleagues reported similar mixed reactions. Many reported that their strategy for coming out was to speak naturally about same sex partners when it came up in conversation. One teacher who came out to a gay and a straight coworker got a positive reaction: "They asked me questions about [my] relationship [with my partner]. They thought it was wonderful." A lesbian/bisexual woman who was

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[11] Respondent #16, survey, p. 2.

out to a few coworkers said the people she came out to directly were indifferent or supportive: "Generally, they didn't seem to care. Some thanked me/said they felt honored that I told them." However, others' reactions were more hostile: "As others seemed to 'hear' about it, some seemed to try to avoid contact with me--i.e. looking the other way in passing in the hallway." Although many respondents only came out to people they felt close to, they could not limit the number of people who would find out about them: other, less tolerant colleagues soon got wind of the news.[12]

Another teacher deliberately came out to all of his coworkers, and encountered a variety of responses. Two rather odd and negative responses were upsetting to him:

> Some people could care less. Some people seem surprised/even annoyed. One person told me I was going to hell. Another person refuses to acknowledge the fact I'm gay and still asks about my girlfriend.[13]

Damnation and denial by one's colleagues can by rather disconcerting. Sadly, these things were not said by mortal enemies, but by people this teacher had considered to be friends. For most of my respondents, then, coming out to heterosexuals was a riskier prospect than coming out to queer coworkers.

Despite the risks, however, nine of the people I surveyed were out to all of their colleagues. Most had to "maintain" their "outness" by telling new people, or confronting colleagues who refused to recognize them as queer. Two of the

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[12] Respondent #8, survey, p. 2. Respondent #14, survey, p. 2.

[13] Respondent #5, survey, p. 3.

respondents, both teacher educators, mentioned that they came out in their job interviews. They did not want to have a job where they couldn't be out: "I told them I wouldn't take the job if it mattered."[14] Neither reported any major negative consequences, and both got the jobs they wanted. Other teachers came out to their coworkers by making references to their personal lives in casual conversations, mostly by mentioning same-sex partners or talking about attending queer events.

Strategies for coming out and maintaining visibility varied. As a point of comparison, I looked at the approaches of two people who were extremely public about their sexual orientations. One public school teacher was very confrontational about his being gay:

> Confrontations have been numerous, but through wit, physical endurance, and legal action, even occasionally reasoning, I have survived and now am seen as both an activist, a student advocate, and/or a nuisance; that is, to bureaucrats, especially when I am out on local news broadcasts or at academic conferences.[15]

Unlike other teachers who found support by coming out to queer colleagues, however, this teacher sometimes intimidated those who were less out than he:

> Well, there are lots of them in my school, but I wind up protecting them, because they're not out there. But my presence...makes them a little more comfortable. After a year one of them got the nerve up to wear an earring....It does it in those kinds of little ways. It does not make them come out. In many cases it drives some people back....I find out that I can be very intimidating...and it disassociates me from people in a way, especially my own groupings. But I'm not really going to get too upset about that--that's their problem....I may

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[14] Respondent #18, survey, p. 2.

[15] Respondent #4, survey, p. 5.

> get shot down in the street because of what happens to me, but at least I won't have shut down or been shot down because I was silent.[16]

His words reflect fundamental conflicts within the queer community: should everyone come out, so that it will be easier for all of us, even though some of us will suffer more than others? Can teachers not come out but still support their colleagues who are out and still challenge homophobia? For this teacher, the pain of silence was worse than any possible consequences of coming out.

Another thing to consider is that while he is in a difficult situation because he teaches in public school, he also has a full-time tenured position, while most of the others I spoke to had little job security. On the other hand, this teacher said he was just as out before he got tenure. Interestingly, he said that he was met with generally favorable reactions from students and colleagues, and some parents. His only conflicts were with administrators and a few parents. He attributed his acceptance to the fact that he went out of his way to help students with their problems, so they saw him as an advocate.

In contrast, another teacher's style was much less confrontational, but he was still out to everyone. He came out by writing a story about the death of his lover from AIDS, which was published in a local journal. He said that reactions were "for the most part, supportive, although a few of the conservative born-again types were somewhat taken aback." It helped, he said, that "many of the support

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[16] Respondent #4, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Jan. 8, 1994, Philadelphia.

personnel have gay friends or relatives."[17] This teacher relied on reaching people with an emotional story about himself and the fact that they already had some comfort level with queers. His environment seemed to be less hostile than that of the more confrontational teacher.

One teacher succinctly summed up why he thinks teachers should come out to their colleagues: one reason is that "most homophobic people believe that they know no one who is gay. Which means they don't have a face to put on 'gayness.'" They only have stereotypes and misinformation to go by. Another reason is that "there are millions of family and friends and colleagues who are just waiting for us to say it so that they can ask us questions. They're dying to know." Coming out can not only create a safe space for other queer teachers to come out; it also opens up room for heterosexuals to talk about sexual orientation issues that they may have felt unable to bring up themselves. However, for various reasons, many people choose not to come out at work. Most of the people I talked to (and I agree) acknowledged that when, where and how to come out is an individual decision: "Important anywhere, but definitely up to the individual and his/her phase of development--I don't believe in 'outing.'"[18]

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[17] Respondent #17, survey, p. 2.

[18] Respondent #4, interview. Respondent #7, survey, p. 3.

Hiding at Work

In order to avoid being "found out," some people go to great lengths to pretend to be heterosexual. I thought that teachers who were not out would put a lot of effort into not being discovered. In contrast, most of the teachers I surveyed did not think that they actively avoided coming out. However, unlike heterosexuals, queers are so conditioned to filter out talk about our same-sex partners and private lives that we may not even be aware of the extent to which we do it. For example, many of the people I interviewed considered their sexual orientation to be a private matter, but most heterosexual teachers I know make no secret of the fact that they are married, have children, boyfriends and girlfriends, etc. when talking to their colleagues. It is therefore necessary to read between the lines of these respondents' comments about hiding, and to see how much they talk about their personal lives compared with heterosexuals.

When I asked the ten people who were not out to all colleagues what they do to prevent being "found out" at work, half said they took the path of least resistance: they didn't go out of their way to tell people or to hide. The other half said they either avoided the topic of relationships or pretended to be straight. One bisexual woman with a female partner said:

> I did not mention a significant other, did not hang anything specific on my walls. Most people weren't interested in my personal life....I would find it hard to lie if anyone asked me, though.

When asked how she felt about not being out, she said:

> I was never big on discussing my private life with people I don't know well. It's harder when you start to know people and care

> about them. Many people assume I'm het, which can be both a relief and a huge annoyance.

Similarly, a gay teacher said:

> Sometimes I avoid talking about romantic relationships of any type. I like to talk about "we" when talking about weekend plans or household happenings. I want my colleagues to be curious about the "we" I speak about. Ideally, they will ask me who the second person is. This, of course, doesn't happen too often. Perhaps this is because they suspect and feel uncomfortable with the subject. If this is true, I consider it their problem and not mine.

Both of these teachers were not overtly out, but seemed to want other teachers to take their cues and ask about their personal lives. Taking the initiative in coming out was their obstacle. This is not surprising, since heterosexuals often don't understand why queers bring up the issue of their sexual orientation.[19]

Four other teachers made some effort to maintain a "straight" facade, which was very unpleasant for them. The lesbian/bisexual teacher in South America wrote that in the past she did a lot to avoid being out to everyone:

> I don't discuss relationships, try to keep the use of the pronoun "we" to a minimum; if pressed I mention past male lovers (the most repugnant option because it implies a lack of commitment to my partner).

She said she felt bad about having to lie, but that it was necessary: "It's uncomfortable when I have to deceive people I may feel close to, but the risks involved in coming out are too great."[20]

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[19] Respondent #9, survey, p. 3. Ibid. Respondent #8, survey, p. 3.

[20] Respondent #16, survey, p. 3.

Another bisexual woman, who was not out to her boss or to most coworkers, said to prevent being found out, "[I] hide behind my 'straight' personae," although "I'm not very happy about it." A third gay teacher said that he sometimes concealed his sexuality, but not always: "I like some people to find me out. To 'cover up,' I simply go with the hype of students pairing me off with other young, female teachers." This strategy clearly was beginning to take its toll:

> [I feel] somewhat suppressed/oppressed. I'm arriving at the point, for the very first time, that homosexual is what and who I am. It hurts me (a little), to not be able to share that with other people. I feel that [I am] a cork under pressure, and will pop soon, in the near future.

Not being able to share such an important milestone in his life was repressive to this teacher (and after he wrote this, he did come out to a colleague).[21]

Finally, bisexuals with opposite-sex partners face a complicated task in coming out, in that they can't simply reveal their sexual orientation by talking about their partners. One bi woman reports that since she is married, people assume she is straight:

> It's like passing. Nobody even questions, nobody even thinks....If you're living with a woman, then they might say, "Hmmm, she should be married by now, and she's living with a woman, so I wonder."...But when you're already married people just automatically assume....I let people assume if they're going to assume, but if they ask me I don't lie....I don't go out of my way either way, to either tell or to hide.

It is easier to pass for straight if one is married (which both bisexuals and gays/lesbians sometimes do), and one can rely upon this camouflage if one wants to

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[21] Respondent #2, survey, p. 3. Respondent #3, survey, p. 3. Ibid.

remain in the closet. Coming out, however, is messier when one is married or with an opposite-sex partner:

> I think there's a lot of--I don't know if I would call it ignorance, disbelief. People just don't understand the concept. Even gays don't understand: "you're either attracted to one...or the other."

Regardless of one's current relationship status, a bisexual's sexual and cultural identity is just as important to her/him as a gay man's or lesbian's, but this fact is often not recognized. A bisexual who comes out may not even encounter support from gay and lesbian colleagues who are confused about bisexuality or hostile toward bisexuals, which is unfortunately fairly common.[22]

Some of these teachers made efforts to hide themselves, some were passive about coming out or staying in, and some made a point of coming out to everyone. The strain of staying in the closet and worrying about being found out saps energy for teaching, and forces people to lead fragmented lives. The climate of the work place can make coming out to colleagues terrifying, comfortable, or somewhere in between.

Administrators Set the Tone of an Institution

Administrators play a large part in creating an atmosphere that is accepting of, indifferent to or hostile toward queers. A few of the respondents had very supportive administrators, some administrators were extremely hostile, and many were indifferent or the respondents did not mention them.

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[22] Respondent #6, Telephone interview, tape recording, Jan. 22, 1994, Philadelphia.

One teacher, who was already out to all of his colleagues, reported the following supportive intervention from his supervisors. The incident arose from a conversation among a few staff members:

> Someone was attacking religion, and this person got very offended because she was very religious....Then I somehow got involved...and she said "well, you know how I feel about homosexuality. I mean, I think you're going to hell." And it bothered me, because I've heard that quite a few times from many religious people.
>
> So that was a situation where I went immediately to our supervisors, both of them...and I said, "I think that we need some sort of sensitivity training for the staff. I think that teachers probably know how to be sensitive in the classroom, but they may not know how to be sensitive to other teachers." And I told them what happened, and they were both very concerned. I also explained that it wasn't just the homosexuality, or homophobia, that was a problem. It was also being more careful about people's religion and sensitive to those needs as well. I know that we did have a staff development day on sensitivity training, which didn't go over very well. But we did have one after that [incident].[23]

This teacher put the homophobic comments into a context of general insensitivity, instead of treating them as an isolated incident or an individual's problem. His supervisors responded with not only understanding but also an attempt to change the institutionalized homophobia (although it was not well received by staff, and perhaps the issues could have been addressed in a more effective way). Not surprisingly, these same supervisors had previously included "sexual orientation" in their non-discrimination clause at the request of this teacher. This statement gave him a basic assurance that his rights would not be

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[23] Respondent #5, Telephone interview, tape recording, Jan. 16, 1994, Philadelphia.

violated, and that his concerns stood a good chance of being addressed at an institutional level.

In contrast, five respondents talked about having very homophobic bosses who made them uncomfortable and wary of losing their jobs. One lesbian said that most of her administrators have been "pretty good," although one individual was homophobic:

> One of my administrators at one place...didn't feel very comfortable about my coming out to this class and having them write on the subject because she thought that might influence their opinions or writings, but this was a non-graded class. These were all adults, so, I felt that she was pretty homophobic. Again in general, she's pretty open, but not in this instance. I think it depends on the individual. Some administrators are very ok, and some are very homophobic.[24]

In this case, it seems that the administrator was afraid of the teacher "influencing" students with a statement about herself. In contrast, most administrators would not think twice about teachers including topics such as "marriage" and "the perfect spouse" in a writing class. While this administrator was not rabidly homophobic, her ignorance stifled the teacher and contributed to the invisibility of queers.

Another lesbian talked about her supervisor's attempt to fire her based on her sexual orientation:

> I had a problem with one administrator...who wasn't exactly pinpointing exactly what was the problem, and I had a feeling it was because I was not conforming to the mold that this administrator had thought, and I think it had to do with the fact that I am a lesbian. And I explained it to the union, and the union agreed with me, but we couldn't prove it because nothing was really said and everything was very [underhanded]. It had to be [that she suspected

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[24] Respondent #1B, interview.

> I was a lesbian], because there was nothing that I was doing wrong....They tried to fire me.
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> So, but then I switched to another campus, where...everyone's very cool...and nobody says anything. The other campus where I was, they were very homophobic, I felt. They...made off-color comments about people who were gay. But I never said anything--I just listened and stepped out of the room, and thought, "those people have a real problem."[25]

Even though this woman was apparently protected by a non-discrimination clause, she was without recourse because she could not prove the discrimination, as is often the case. Her administrator's prejudice contributed to the climate of homophobia: it made the other teachers feel comfortable being very openly homophobic. Because this lesbian had such homophobic leadership, she did not take the risk of confronting the homophobia of her coworkers.

Another teacher, a bisexual woman, spoke about her director, who was not only homophobic but bigoted in general:

> My boss discovered I had invited guest speakers (at the students' request) to talk about their experiences being gay and she expressed strong disapproval ("you must include an 'alternative viewpoint'"). I had to produce written verification of the students' requests. Needless to say, I wasn't going to come out to her after that. In general she has created a general climate of intolerance although most instructors (and many students) do not share her views.[26]

This director's homophobia was expressed in a typical fashion: the idea that "homosexuality" is a behavioral choice or opinion, that must be counteracted with "morally proper" opinions. This approach is just as ludicrous as having an African

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[25] Respondent #1A, interview.

[26] Respondent #2, survey, p. 3.

American and a Ku Klux Klan member engage in an "open debate" about whether or not African Americans have the same rights as white people (rather than having a discussion about the nature of racism, African American culture, etc.). However, many heterosexuals feel that this would be a reasonable way to present the issues of sexual minorities.

In this instance, the students clearly wanted to talk about the issue, so they were not being "influenced" against their will. The administrator was able to set a tone of intolerance even when the majority of her staff did not agree with her. This intolerance made the teacher less willing to come out, obviously because she was afraid of losing her job (although she did continue with her lesson plans and eventually came out to some classes). The only positive thing about the director's bigotry is that it at least prompted some heterosexual teachers to support this woman as allies: they united against a common enemy, their boss. However, these teachers were not willing to take many risks in support of queers: "Other instructors thought her stance was ridiculous but in general they don't work actively to bring up gay/lesbian/bisexual issues in their classrooms."[27]

Among the teachers I surveyed, two gay men also mentioned administrators who attempted to silence them. One teacher circulated articles to other teachers about using gay/les/bi literature in the classroom; the articles were confiscated by his supervisor. In response, he filed a lawsuit at the urging of the local human rights commission. In addition, he faces attempts to fire him every

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[27] Ibid.

time he speaks up in a public setting about being an openly gay teacher or stands up for queer students. Only his tenured position and professional reputation prevent him from being dismissed. The other teacher, who had very good support from his boss at first, was indirectly censured for being "too out" once he began to be out on more than a local level. The boss was concerned about bringing embarrassment to his institution. These two administrators attempt to silence these teachers because they do not want their schools to be publicly recognized as being supportive of queers. Homophobia can be deeply ingrained at the institutional level.

Institutional Policies and Benefits

Most queer teachers in TESOL are not guaranteed the same basic rights as their heterosexual colleagues: they are not protected from job discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Some institutions have begun to recognize the need for this protection, and have incorporated the necessary changes into their policies. In addition, a few states and municipalities have created non-discrimination clauses that include sexual orientation.[28] Of the people I surveyed, ten said they were not protected against job discrimination by their institutions, two were not sure, six were protected and one did not answer. All six

[28] Eight states have civil rights laws that include sexual orientation: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont and Wisconsin. Eighty-seven cities or counties have civil rights ordinances, and thirty-nine cities or counties have executive proclamations that ban discrimination in employment for sexual minorities. From Associated Press, "But it's not all bad news," (box) Philadelphia Gay News, April 29-May 5 1994, 1. Note, however, that many of these laws and orders only cover public employees.

of those with institutional policies also worked in municipalities that had non-discrimination laws. One school even had an affirmative-action policy that includes sexual minorities. As the gay man who felt "empowered" about coming out at work said, "It really helps that [my city] has a strict anti-discrimination ordinance."[29] A basic guarantee against discrimination is the first step toward achieving equal status with heterosexual colleagues.

In addition to basic rights, queers also do not have the same financial benefits that are extended to heterosexual teachers. For example, benefits that allow spouses to be included in insurance plans, take classes with a tuition reduction, use facilities, or share "family" housing are usually not granted to same-sex partners of teachers. Because these benefits are usually restricted to married couples, and it is illegal for two people of the same sex to get married, those in same-sex couples are automatically excluded. These benefits have a financial value, and thus queer teachers are not receiving the same compensation as their heterosexual colleagues. However, some institutions and cities have begun granting benefits to the domestic partners of their employees (some policies are only for same-sex couples, and some include any unmarried couple). Hawaii is currently considering legalizing gay marriage or recognizing domestic partners.[30]

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[29] Respondent #10, survey, p. 3.

[30] Twelve cities currently have domestic partner legislation: Austin, TX, Berkeley, CA, Boston, Burlington, VT, Cambridge, MA, East Lansing, MI, Minneapolis, New York City, Santa Cruz, CA, San Francisco, Seattle, and West Hollywood, CA. From Timothy Cwiek and Nancy Lamar, "Deadline for Rendell: Domestic Partners," Philadelphia Gay News, April 29-May 5 1994, 14. However, usually only city employees are granted benefits. George de Lama, "Hawaii May Lead Way on Same-Sex Marriage," Chicago Tribune (May 15, 1994): News section, p. 21.

Of the people I surveyed, only one person said that her partner was eligible for insurance through her institution. However, their relationship was relatively new and therefore they had not yet declared themselves domestic partners. Another man said his institution granted sick leave to take care of a sick domestic partner, but no other benefits. The other respondents had no domestic partner benefits. Most queer teachers face this same gross economic inequity. On the other hand, the issue of partner benefits is obscured by the fact that many of these teachers, who do not have full-time jobs, do not even have insurance for themselves. In addition, for some of the people I talked to, partner benefits were not an issue because they were not involved in committed relationships at the time, and two of the women were married to men, so they could be granted typical spousal benefits (although neither had full-time jobs). Nevertheless, regardless of one's current relationship status, the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships is both an economic and social slap in the face for queer teachers.

Teachers without benefits for their partners cited several issues as problems: obtaining insurance, housing, lower tuition rates and visas. When one teacher asked the college president about getting insurance and cheaper tuition rates for her partner, the president told her "he thought it would be 'dangerous to the institution.'"[31] He did not elaborate on how the college would be endangered. Another teacher said that he did not get insurance at the moment because he worked part time, but he did not think he would be eligible in the

[31] Respondent #14, survey, p. 4.

future because "[the state I work in] still considers sodomy an illegal act."[32] Thus people who work in the twenty-three states where sodomy is illegal[33] also have to overcome the fact that their relationship is illegal, before they can hope to be granted the same benefits as heterosexuals. Not to mention that there is a growing movement against teachers, the media and government employees promoting positive images of and providing information about queers.

For EFL teachers, international homophobia enters into the picture. The woman who is currently teaching in South America talked about visa and housing problems:

> We're planning to go to Japan--she already has a job. If we were a straight couple, the university might offer something for her spouse. As it is, the university is offering her housing, but I won't be allowed to live in her apartment, according to their rules--"only bona fide employees of the university or members of their immediate family are allowed."[34]

Most same-sex couples teaching outside the U.S. are not given any of the accommodations made for married heterosexual couples, have greater difficulty getting visas, and also face an unknown quantity of homophobia from a different culture. More research should be done about the specific needs of EFL teachers.[35]

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[32] Respondent #8, survey, p. 4.

[33] George de Lama, "Hawaii May Lead Way."

[34] Respondent #16, survey, p. 4.

[35] For a good summary of issues for gay EFL teachers, see Alex Hirst, "Gay's the Word, but Not in EFL."

Almost all queer teachers work for institutions that don't recognize our rights or the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. We are treated as second-class citizens, and have had to fight for every right and benefit we have achieved, while some heterosexuals cry "special privileges" (although we are merely asking for the same rights that heterosexuals already have). Queers need a basic safety net that assures the same protection and benefits as our heterosexual counterparts.

Career Decisions Affected by Homophobia

The absence of a basic statement that protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation keeps queer teachers in constant fear of losing our jobs because of who we are. Queer teachers are not the only ones who lose out because of discriminatory policies, however. The institutions we work for also lose out, because they dismiss, don't hire or don't retain qualified teachers because of their homophobic environments. Why would a competent teacher want to stay at an institution that is hostile in its policies? Those who want to be comfortable where they work, and to have the same opportunities as their coworkers, sometimes make career decisions based on finding an institution that will be welcoming. One teacher illustrates this phenomenon of "voting with one's feet:"

> The community college I work at is notoriously homophobic. I've been informed that I'll never rise into an administrative position (despite my Ph.D.) due to my "proclivities" (i.e. being queer)....I consulted a lawyer about suing, only to be informed that the school is within its rights since it does not have an anti-discrimination

> clause based on sexual preference. Thus, I'm thinking of taking a tenure track position at the university instead.[36]

Because of its homophobia, this community college is going to lose out on an employee who would otherwise make a long-term commitment and perhaps become an administrator who "rose from the ranks."

Besides looking for basic guarantees of rights, people in same-sex couples may seek out institutions that have domestic partner benefits. For example, one teacher I spoke to will be finishing his Ph.D. soon and will be starting a job search. He said "I've chosen to stay in academia because it seems that the people are a little more educated and sympathetic to our cause." He also said about domestic-partner benefits:

> It would definitely be a deciding factor [in where I'd like to work]. In fact, on the Internet there was a list not too long ago of colleges and universities that have already granted domestic partnership, and I keep that list. I'll be looking for a job next year, so it's definitely in the front of my mind. Especially if we have to relocate. Right now, [my partner] has his own health care package....But if we relocate, then it's definitely going to be a concern. Because if I get a job and he doesn't, then we're going to both need health care.

While universities and colleges often fret about the cost of domestic partner benefits, what they sometimes don't realize is that it can be a big selling point for attracting qualified teachers.[37]

Compared to most colleges and universities, public schools tend to be rabidly homophobic. One teacher, who taught in public schools before becoming

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[36] Respondent #17, survey, p. 3.

[37] Respondent #5, interview.

a teacher educator, said, "I chose several jobs because I thought it would put me in more social and professional contact with gay men...Teaching was a decision in spite of the homophobia." Many people choose to endure the homophobia because they love what they are doing. When I asked him why, he said:

> I have always been a teacher. I have been a teacher since I was the oldest kid in my neighborhood. I mean, I took all of my books (I had more books than any kid in the neighborhood) and made a lending library and sort of forced kids to read. I used to read to them. I have been a teacher all of my life.

Despite the homophobia, this teacher chose to follow his calling. We must wonder how many other potential teachers rule themselves out because they believe that the homophobia would be too overwhelming.[38]

Another teacher's career plans may be changed because of the homophobia in public schools. She has thought about teaching in the local district. However, her mother teaches in the same small district and does not want to be affected by having a "known queer" for a daughter:

> She feels it would reflect badly on her if people knew that I was queer: "Well gee, she can't even raise a daughter that's 'normal.'" She feels that that's what people would say, and therefore question how fit she was to be a high school teacher. I think she's overreacting....I'm not sure if she knows...what she really thinks [because she also wants me to try to get a job]....If I sensed a place was really homophobic, I don't think I would stay there....I guess even if it were a lot of money...I would probably try to find another job as fast as I could.[39]

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[38] Respondent #10, survey, p. 4. Respondent #10, interview.

[39] Respondent #9, telephone interview by author, tape recording, Feb. 6, 1994, Philadelphia.

The families of queer teachers may be affected by "guilt by association" and blame the queer family member for the homophobia. This teacher's career opportunities are affected by both her mother's concerns and her own wish to work in an accepting environment.

As more institutions establish protections against discrimination and provide equal benefits for same-sex couples, we may see a trend of more queer teachers seeking out the most favorable environments. This is something for every institution to think about, just as it should be thinking about whether it is attracting a racially and ethnically diverse staff.

Intersections of Homophobia with Other Forms of Oppression

Homophobia does not exist in a vacuum. It is related to and interacts with sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of oppression. Although many teachers cited the openness of their coworkers in accepting other cultures, it would be naive to expect ESOL institutions to be free from prejudice. Several people I surveyed and interviewed spoke about encountering multiple forms of oppression.

Sexism interacts with homophobia to make lesbians and bisexual women more isolated than queer men. It is significant, I think, that of the nine people surveyed who were out to all of their colleagues, only three were women. Of the three who were out to all of their students, one was a woman. This difference reveals the added burden of sexism that lesbians and bisexual women face.

Cynthia Nelson spoke about lesbian invisibility and sexism in her speech that was part of the "We Are Your Colleagues" colloquium:

> When I say the word *gay* to most colleagues or students, I doubt too many of them first picture a woman. Sexism is alive and well. It's not that we lesbians aren't out there teaching ESL in every corner of the world, but, like most other self-supporting working women, we tend to have concerns about job security. Being out in a relatively competitive field is a tough choice to make. Dealing with sexism in the work place, or the classroom, isn't easy either.[40]

Lesbians may be less willing to come out because they have, as a group, less financial security than gay men, and therefore more to lose. This invisibility creates isolation, which takes a psychological toll.

Nelson said that as a graduate student:

> I went to the office of one of my professors and said, "As a lesbian teacher I am feeling extremely isolated. I need resources, role models, support. I need to talk to someone who is going through this. Please put me in touch with other lesbians in ESL." My professor said that I was only the second person in 6 years to be out in our program. I started to cry. She said she knew one woman and would ask her if she'd call me. The woman did call me. It turned out she was the only lesbian in ESL I already knew.[41]

This overwhelming silence and isolation adds a great deal of stress to a teacher's life. Not having role models leaves one with little support in coming out or dealing with the combination of sexism and homophobia. Gay and bi men, while they have some issues in common with lesbians and bi women, tend to have more money and be more visible.

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[40] Cynthia Nelson, "Heterosexism in ESL," 147.

[41] Ibid.

In addition to sexism, racism and anti-Semitism often go hand-in-hand with homophobia. Two Jewish lesbians I interviewed together spoke about how these multiple forms of oppression were present at several places where they worked. One gay administrator made a lot of racist remarks:

> [He] makes constant African American [jokes]. Oh, it's really disgusting. I can't believe what comes out of this guy's mouth....It's really unprofessional....So you have to deal with that, and there's only one African American woman who's teaching ESL in our floor.[42]

Racism from administrators, whether they are queer or heterosexual, supports a climate of intolerance. That these comments come from a gay man reveals that one can belong to an oppressed group and still oppress others: suffering does not automatically make one more sensitive. Not surprisingly, this administrator only had one African American woman on his staff.

In addition to racism in this setting, this teacher felt that there was also a lot of anti-Semitism. Her students were Jewish Russians, and she thought the other teachers did not like the way they acted (and her partner agreed):

> B: ...sometimes I'm wondering if [the teachers] are not anti-Semitic, with some of the comments [they] are making.
>
> Author: About the students?
>
> B: Yes, because they <u>are</u> Jewish, and maybe there is something that they do that is particular to that group...coming from Russia, and they've had to deal with certain things. They've had to survive, and because of their type of survivor skills, of being aggressive...a lot of people don't know what to do with that, because the Vietnamese

[42] Respondent #1B, interview.

> are very quiet and subdued,...whereas the Russians will come and demand, this is what they want....
>
> Author: So it's like the "pushy Jew" thing?
>
> A: Exactly. Like one teacher said to her, "I just can't teach those people." We both have that same heritage.[43]

Instead of recognizing the different cultural styles of Russian Jews and Vietnamese, these teachers labelled the Jews "unteachable" because they were unwilling to accept how the students acted, or to understand why they had to be so aggressive. This is a typical form of anti-Semitism, from which the "pushy Jew" stereotype comes: when a people are only allowed a marginal position in a society, they develop certain skills for survival. Those from the dominant group (non-Jews in this case) take their privilege for granted, so they can't understand why Jews must be more aggressive to meet their basic needs. This intolerance of Jewish culture and styles must make the environment uncomfortable for the Jewish teachers as well as the students. In this particular instance, racism and anti-Semitism were more salient issues for this teacher than homophobia.

In another instance, both the racism and homophobia of an administrator created a generally intolerant climate. The administrator who chastised a teacher for bringing in guest speakers to talk about being queer (see "Administrators Set the Tone" section) also subtly reinforced racist, sexist and classist ideas. For example, "she hires people she knows, and she doesn't know anybody who's black." This administrator also espouses sexist ideas:

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[43] Respondents #1A and 1B, interview.

> [She] holds very traditional notions about gender roles and behaves accordingly (e.g., says to [a part-time] instructor without health insurance, "well, don't you have it through your husband?").

In addition to her sexist and racist ideas and practices, this administrator also made comments about "bums" on the street. In this case, the administrator is uniformly prejudiced against almost everyone, and thereby sets a tone of intolerance that reinforces the homophobia.[44]

Finally, a few respondents spoke about how classism colored their teaching experiences. For example, one lesbian reported that she was from a very poor background, and had struggled to put herself through college. Although she did not tell students this, some of her middle-class students sensed that she was "different" and constantly questioned her authority. (For a more detailed description of this experience, see chapter four, "Understanding and Sensitivity.")

For those teachers who must endure racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, classism, etc. in addition to homophobia (i.e. those who are not white gay wealthy men), other forms of oppression play an important part of their lives and may eclipse homophobia in some instances. These issues overlap and interact in complicated ways, and often reinforce one another. Ironically, many TESOL professionals would be appalled at overt racism, sexism, etc. but most do not challenge homophobia as well: queers have not quite made it into the "multicultural family."

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[44] Respondent #2, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Dec. 12, 1993, Philadelphia. Respondent #2, survey, p. 4. Respondent #2, interview.

A whole range of issues affects the climate of a queer teacher's work place, including the number of queer teachers who are out; reactions of colleagues to their coming out; attitudes of administrators; the absence or presence of official policies ensuring basic rights and equity of benefits; and the combination of homophobia with racism, sexism and anti-Semitism. The people I surveyed reported a range of climates from supportive to hostile. At one end was the teacher who said that all of his colleagues went to the March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Equal Rights. In the middle were those who received mixed reactions to their coming out, or received grudging acceptance due to their sheer numbers. At the other end were those who faced job discrimination and censorship because of their sexual orientations. Teachers take all of these issues with them into the classroom, along with their sexual orientations and cultural identities. All of these factors affect how they deal with what seemed to be the most difficult issue for the people I surveyed: the decision whether or not and how to come out to their students.

CHAPTER THREE

COMING OUT IN THE CLASSROOM

Coming out to students was the issue that my respondents seemed most concerned about: the stakes were much higher than coming out to colleagues. Wrapped up in this issue is the fear not only of losing one's job, but also of losing the respect of one's students, of damaging the delicate teacher-student relationship. It raises the fundamental questions of how "real" a teacher can or should be, how much of ourselves we should share with our students, and how much honesty and communication can exist in a class. The issue of sexual orientation is not created by queer teachers: it is already all around us. The decision is whether to deal with it as a personal issue, to be more general and not mention our own interest in the matter, or to just ignore it.

From the very first "Are you married?" question from a student, queer teachers must struggle with this decision. For those who teach children or adolescents, the issue is even more loaded. As one teacher summed up the position in which she finds herself:

> They'll always ask you [if you're married]. You have to answer them. If you want to not say anything, it's kind of like denial because you're a non-person with no life....You don't have to, because some people feel that maybe it really isn't [students'] business. In some groups it's just better to pretend you have no life. But if you want to get close with your students, you have to show

> some human side, and part of your human nature is showing you have friends or partners or relationships.[1]

The teachers I surveyed had a variety of approaches to dealing with the coming out question.

Most respondents reported trepidation about this subject. Nevertheless, most of them did come out to at least some of their students. Three came out to all students as a matter of course, six came out only to certain classes, and four came out only to certain individual students. For the most part, student reactions to their coming out were positive, although one teacher reported a disastrous response. The remaining six said that they had not come out to any students, although many expressed wishes to do so in the future. They cited several reasons for choosing not to come out. However, most of those who did not come out dealt with sexual orientation in some way in their classroom. (I will address how teachers covered sexual orientation in the class content in chapter four.)

Why Some Teachers Don't Come Out to Students

Many teachers who don't come out to their classes have very reasonable fears. They run the risk of being misunderstood, both as who they are and what their motives for coming out are. They may lose the respect of their students; face accusations of "molestation" or "recruitment" from colleagues, parents or administrators; be publicly humiliated; or lose their jobs. Furthermore, coming

[1] Respondent #1A, interview.

out to students whose English proficiency and knowledge of the teacher's culture are limited presents a good possibility of at least some confusion, if not gross misunderstandings. Teachers also may not know how to integrate coming out into their everyday class work. On the other hand, they may simply feel that it is not appropriate because it would be "taking a side," or that it is irrelevant and none of the students' business. The teachers I interviewed cited reasons like these for not coming out to classes.

Some didn't come out to their students because they felt that it was just not appropriate. They did not want to upset the equilibrium in the class, or be seen as taking a side. One teacher said "I might come out to an individual student outside of class if s/he demonstrated sympathy and interest. Otherwise, I don't want to jeopardize the balance in the classroom."[2] Another teacher, who did come out to individual students, also said he did not come out in class:

> I feel like it's more important...for them not really to know. I think it's important to discuss the issues, but I think it's also important for the teacher to remain neutral, so that [students] can say anything they want without feeling like they're going to get a bad grade or something if they go against what the teacher feels.[3]

In addition to trying to remain neutral, this teacher thought that his coming out would force students to confront an issue that they did not have the linguistic sophistication for, and one that they were unlikely to change their opinions about.

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[2] Respondent #16, survey, p. 4.

[3] Respondent #7, Telephone interview by author, tape recording, Jan. 23, 1994, Philadelphia.

Two other teachers thought that coming out was inappropriate, but for different reasons. One thought that his sexual orientation was unimportant to his teaching: "I think for 99% of the time, it is irrelevant....I am a teacher, not a queer teacher. I am a queer who is a teacher." The other teacher felt that it was just too personal: "I would never lie to a student if they asked directly, but I don't see that I need to make a point of telling them otherwise. Sexuality is very personal." Both of these teachers chose not to come out because they did not think it mattered very much to their students.[4]

In contrast, some respondents wanted to come out but were simply unsure of how and when to do it appropriately. Several said that although they did not come out to students as a general rule, they would not lie if asked. However, it was rare that students asked directly: they tended to ask more indirect questions like "are you married?" which could provide an opening for coming out, but was not always used as one. Teachers who are waiting to be asked are in a position like that of a girl (in the old days?) sitting on the sidelines at a high school dance: they feel that it would be seen as too forward to if they took the initiative. This is in reaction to the fact that heterosexuals often can't understand why queers bring up the issue.

On the other hand, two respondents reported being directly asked or baited about their sexual orientations by students. Their responses differed according to their situations. A lesbian who was substituting for one day in a class said:

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[4] Respondent #13, survey, p. 6. Respondent #6, survey, p. 4.

> [The students] ask you if you are married, and one guy had me pinpointed--I'm sure he knew I was [a lesbian]. He asked me, "Are you gay?" and I just denied it because I didn't feel like feeding into him at all....I just felt it was not important. This guy was totally obnoxious.[5]

Because she clearly wasn't going to get a good reaction from these students, and had nothing invested in maintaining a relationship with them, she chose not to come out in this case.

A gay man who is in a different type of situation chose to deflect the questions. He teaches at a private secondary boarding school, and described being needled by a male student who lived in the same dorm:

> [He] always rips on me. He's always saying bisexual things. I looked at him at one point and I said, "Well, you know I've had more propositions from both sexes than I think you'll ever have," and he just laughed it off....I really don't know if I would lose my job [if I came out]....I'm a very well-liked and respected person there. I do a really good job....I really don't think it would be a really big deal. However again I'm not willing to take the risk.

He also had been "pegged" by two advisees of his:

> Two of my favorite students are twins....Their uncle just died of AIDS...and he was homosexual. They were real upset about it.... These twins have also pegged me as bisexual, which I think is funny [since I'm gay]. I've never denied it. They have this monologue with themselves because I never answer them: "Well that's ok, if you were bisexual....It wouldn't change my opinion of you."...(I think because I have such a strong appeal with women [they think I'm bisexual])....It's neat to actually just witness this: here are two students who I know have pegged me. Still it's not a big deal for them, and the guy who lives across the hall has pegged me too, and it's not a big deal....I like it because I want to see where it's going to go.

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[5] Respondent #1B, interview.

These students seem to be looking for a gay role model or someone to help them understand their gay uncle. Even though they have given the teacher an opportunity to come out safely, he still is not ready to, because he does not know what the consequences will be. Because of the teacher's justified concerns about homophobia, these students are losing out on an opportunity to talk with an "expert" about issues they are clearly curious about. However, it seems that this teacher welcomes the challenge that the students are presenting him with, and may decide to come out in the future.[6]

The prospect of coming out to students is always haunted by the specter of the accusations that queer teachers want to "recruit" or molest their students. Such charges are usually launched against those who teach children. These fears are based on two myths: that it is possible to "lead someone astray" into the "homosexual lifestyle," and that all queers are child molesters. While these ideas may seem ludicrous to liberal minds, they hold powerful sway in our culture, and are even internalized by queers.

One high school teacher reported that a few of his students tried to use the "molester" myth to get him into trouble:

> A few years ago two students had accused me of fondling them on their buttocks in the front of my class, and the [assistant principal] came in, dragged me out of the room, and started interrogating my whole class. They informed her that no, the kids [had gone] to the back of the room and mooned me.[7]

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[6] Respondent #3, interview. Ibid.

[7] Respondent #4, interview.

The other students were not willing to go along with the false accusations, because most of them saw their teacher as an advocate. However, the threat of such false charges, and the potential of having one's career damaged or even ended is enough to silence most queer teachers of children.

Another teacher, who began his career at the elementary level, said he had internalized the myths so much that he had been afraid of becoming a child molester:

> I didn't realize that I was adopting dominant modes of thought. Like if you're teaching you've got to be really careful or you will molest these children. That's not true at all. I had no desire to do that. But...there's that kind of assumption: "If there's a gay person around young people, look out."

By contrast, he said, "In every school district I taught in...over the years, at least several male teachers were usually asked to leave quietly because of affairs with young women. And yet I didn't connect that." Despite the evidence to the contrary--that most molesters or men having sexual relations with teenage students are heterosexual--he still believed in the myth. His belief caused him to "put such barriers up with kids....There was a wall of ice." In fact, he did not become comfortable relating to the children until he came to some acceptance of his sexuality:

> When I finally just said [to myself], "You know, you're queer. That ain't gonna change," once I knew that...then I could relate to kids and they weren't going to automatically start assuming if I put my hand on them that I was gay and I was making an advance on them. Once I got over that, I could interact a lot more honestly with kids.

That only one of the respondents who has taught children has come out to them suggests that the molester/recruiter myth has the significant effect of silencing queer teachers.[8]

Teachers of adults also can be misunderstood by their students. One teacher was reluctant to come out because:

> A lot of [my students] are Hispanic and Middle Eastern, and from what I know...they're very macho and if you're a man you're expected to be that certain personality, so how would they view their teacher who they now know is not [heterosexual]? In their countries [queers are] really looked down upon....I really don't have any resources or protection,...which makes it...twice as difficult to actually go ahead and come out or even just talk about it in the third person.[9]

The way in which some people in the U.S. speak openly about their sexual orientation seems odd to students from many other cultures. This teacher is assuming (perhaps falsely) that students from these particular cultures would have a difficult time accepting him, and he knows that he would not have outside support should he come out and face a negative reaction.

Another teacher pointed out how negative stereotypes of queers are difficult to counteract: "I don't want to lose their respect. We have such a bad image. They think that gays and lesbians are criminals."[10] A second teacher said:

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[8] Respondent #10, interview.

[9] Respondent #8, interview.

[10] Respondent #1A, interview.

> I'm more concerned about the students finding out than I am about the other teachers, because I know that [my] supervisors would never fire me because I'm gay. But if the students got word, and they decided that they didn't like me because I was gay, then it might cause problems....I mean, I don't know that I would lose my job because of that, but it's certainly possible.[11]

Students who are very uncomfortable with a teacher may well choose to attend another program. While losing his job did not seem very probable for this teacher, it is more likely if one has both homophobic students and supervisors.

Given these negative stereotypes of queers, one teacher, who had had a bad experience coming out to a class (see "A Traumatic Coming-Out Experience"), cited her fear of losing her students' respect:

> The scariest thing, I guess, is the sense that I will lose my students' trust and faith. That the classroom climate will become hostile and I won't be able to teach in that situation. That the students will become so focused on the fact that I am a lesbian...that everything that goes wrong in the classroom they will trace back to this one fact. That a dialogue will be going on in the classroom during class in languages I don't understand and I won't be able to bring it out into the open. I am scared of the hate they feel. It is scary. So deep rooted and so sure they are right. I don't feel like I should have to defend myself or come up with a great argument for why it's ok to be something I am and can't change even if I wanted to.[12]

Given the raw hatred that her students may openly express, she wants to have some control over the way in which the dialog about her sexuality occurs. This teacher resents being put in this vulnerable position in the first place, when heterosexual teachers get automatic acceptance for their sexual orientation.

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[11] Respondent #5, interview.

[12] Respondent #12, Written response to interview questions from author, Jan. 30, 1994.

Although most respondents did not mention it, teachers who come out also face the possibility of physical threats from their students. One lesbian pointed out that she was cautious because students' reactions are unpredictable and could be violent:

> So I have come out to a select group...because you don't know who you're dealing with. There's a bunch of nuts out there. I mean, really, there are some people who have some mental problems, and I don't know what they're going to do. So you have to be selective, and you have to be careful.[13]

While none of the respondents reported being physically threatened, this comment must be understood within the context that hate violence against queers occurs very frequently, and has been on the rise for the past few years. It is possible that a very homophobic student would become so enraged that he/she would threaten or attack a queer teacher.

Respondents chose not to come out (to all or to some students) for a variety of reasons. Some thought it was inappropriate, some were unsure how to do it, and some feared negative consequences ranging from misunderstanding to violence. Fear of losing students' respect seemed to be the most common reason cited for not coming out. While most teachers who did come out reported positive results, one teacher did lose the respect of her students.

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[13] Respondent #1B, interview.

A Traumatic Coming-Out Experience

The worst reaction a teacher reported about coming out to a class was that she lost her students' respect, and was brushed aside and ignored. Having had great expectations for this moment, she was very disappointed with the outcome. Her decision to come out arose when the three students who attended her adult-ed class that night got onto the topic of homosexuality. The decision was very difficult for her:

> You don't have to get personal, I remind myself. Just because the subject comes up doesn't mean you have to come out. I have never, in my eight years of teaching, come out to my ESL students. Never told this truth about myself. I have not pretended to be otherwise ....Sometimes I say, "The woman I live with..." and wonder if the more perceptive ones get it. But I have never said, I am a lesbian. I used to imagine it, imagine they would be confused, think I had announced I was Lebanese. Ask me how long I'd been living here. I...worried their lack of language would be a barrier, felt the cultural differences would make them turn on me, but mostly it was just the feeling that I didn't have the nerve to tell. I was afraid they would stop liking me.[14]

These are fears that many teachers can relate to: that after taking the courageous step of coming out, one would be met with confusion and rejection.

After the students made some comments like "'On t.v. have woman woman. Lesbian....Woman, woman have child. They say, we family too. I don't know," they asked her what she thought. Before responding, she told herself:

> These women like me....That's not going to change if I tell the truth. Maybe it will change their attitudes. Help them to see lesbians really are everywhere...."It's a personal question," I say. "I'm in love with another woman. I'm a lesbian."

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[14] Respondent #12, written interview.

The students responded rather very awkwardly: one started chasing a fly around the room, trying to kill it. Another said "I know!" and started telling the slang word for lesbian in her language, with the first woman joining in. However, the third woman's response was the most devastating:

> She shakes her head stubbornly. "I no understand why talk and talk about this. We no have this. In motel, I work...Lesbian come. Magazine in room. Lesbian. Homosexual. Mmmm. Mmmm. Mmmm." She mimes two people kissing. "All the time, kiss. And bed? Very wet! All the time, very very wet!"

After some giggling, the students changed the topic, then the class ended. During the rest of the term, only one of these three students returned to class. She constantly whispered in Portuguese with a friend, making comments that the teacher thought were probably homophobic.[15]

Looking back on the unfortunate incident, the teacher said:

> I think of myself sitting in front of them, trying to talk to them, trying to let them know this is important to me and I feel ashamed. But I feel angry too, as if I had been tricked somehow into saying it and then not given the attention I wanted. I remember how I said it hurt to be laughed at. That we were discriminated against. That people felt it was all right to hate us. But they seemed more interested in the fly. In the wet bed. In giggling over pornography.[16]

This experience was truly nightmarish, the type of scene that must go through the minds of many teachers before they come out to a class. Not only were the students extremely uncomfortable and insensitive, but also the teacher did not have a chance to defend herself or counter their negative stereotypes. What's

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

more, she received no backup from her school, and felt particularly vulnerable as a part-time teacher. She was unsure if she had any protection from job discrimination. After such an experience, it is not surprising that she is reluctant to come out to more classes.

From this lesbian's traumatic experience, we can learn several things: be prepared for the worst; it may not be a good idea to come out in every situation; and it helps to plan how one is going to come out (although opportunities often occur unpredictably). It also would have been nice if this teacher had had some guidance in how to come out to her class, and some support from colleagues or administrators to back her up. As she said:

> I wish I had some guidelines for how to go about coming out or just some support for not coming out, so I didn't have to always be in conflict about it....If I had some kind of lesson to follow (ha!) it might help. I mean, first you say: I am a lesbian. Then you write it on the board and define it. Then you have a cheery way to deal with all the mixed looks on their faces and comments behind hands.[17]

On a more positive note, this teacher did have a good experience working with a student who came out to her (see "Providing Support for Individual Queer Students").

It is my hope that by examining other teachers' more successful experiences with coming out in the classroom (or dealing with the topic but not coming out), I can help create some guidelines based on others' successes. In addition,

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[17] Ibid.

hopefully, heterosexual teachers and administrators will be convinced that they need to deal with these issues and give better support to queer teachers.

Why Some Teachers Do Come Out to Students

The people I surveyed who had come out to their students did so for several reasons. One was that they did not want to conceal a major part of their lives from their students. They did not feel like whole people unless they could speak freely about this aspect of their lives. In addition, they thought that coming out strengthened their relationship with their students: it created a more comfortable and open atmosphere in the classroom, and encouraged honest sharing. Another reason is that these teachers felt the need to educate their students about the myths and realities about queers, and that coming out was one way to contradict negative stereotypes. Finally, many saw themselves as a role model, and even a life saver, for their queer students. They said they were providing the kind of support and affirmation that they wished they had received when they were younger.

The three teachers who were consistently out to all of their students expressed a great deal of comfort with being able to integrate their professional lives with their personal lives. For example, one teacher trainer said: "By coming out at the very beginning in the office and classroom, I am able to speak about all appropriate areas of my life without "'filtering.'"[18] Having been in the closet for

[18] Respondent #10, survey, p.4.

almost twenty-five years, this teacher had already paid the price of shutting off a part of himself:

> Through college and most of my teaching years, I was creative often in terms of curriculum and stuff like that, but I didn't feel personally creative at all. And now that I've come out, I bring passion to what I do, which was disconnected also. So the passion that I would have put into my fantasy life [when I was in the closet] has come back out into my professional life....It's like the dots are getting connected.... [Before I came out] I was always holding something in reserve.[19]

One of the arguments for coming out is simply that, if teachers can integrate their personal and professional lives, they can be fully present and engaged in their work, instead of diverting energy into concealing a part of themselves.

Most respondents felt unable to come out to all of their students. However, teachers who had come out to only some of their classes reported that they were able to feel a similar satisfaction. In the classes where they did come out, they felt more whole and improved their relationship with their students. One teacher, who had recently come out to a class, expressed his relief at being able to talk about his being gay with his students:

> Most of all it allows me to be myself, to relate honestly with other people without having to put up a facade. By doing that I can become closer to these people that otherwise I would have had to keep a part of me away from....It's just really important politically for me to come out and for everybody else to come out, if and when they can. I think it's important for all of us to some degree to push ourselves in that direction.[20]

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[19] Respondent #10, interview.

[20] Respondent #11, interview.

While coming out is indeed difficult for many people, it is an experience that engenders emotional growth.

Another teacher, when asked why she came out to some classes and how she felt about it, said:

> I feel much more honest, and much more in alignment with my values. I feel like to be a good teacher you have to be yourself, and to be yourself you have to be honest with people. And that doesn't mean that you have to tell all aspects of your life to people.... Certain things are appropriate to tell students at certain times....I really strongly believe that students appreciate it. I feel I have a better rapport with [them]. How can I expect my students to be honest about their feelings if I'm not?...I want people to feel comfortable saying what they think and feel. A lot of times, especially for the Asian students,...it's really hard for them....I try to be up front and say "Well, the reason I'm doing this is because you have the goal of going to college, and this is what they'll expect you to do, and I want you to do well....It's part of cultural learning, and I'm going to try to make it as safe as I can. It's partly about me being vulnerable and open to them....I feel so much more connected to them, the times that I've [come out].[21]

This teacher viewed her coming out not only as a benefit to herself, but also as an example of the type of cultural learning that would benefit her students. She was also risking a great deal, because her boss was extremely homophobic.[22]

Beyond feeling more integrated and building a good rapport with one's students, by coming out one can be a role model and life saver for one's queer students. A public high school teacher spoke about the fact that queer youth have a very high mortality rate, because they are so opp..ssed and have few positive

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[21] Respondent #2, interview.

[22] See chapter two, "Administrators Set the Tone of an Institution."

role models.[23] He was angry that other queer teachers did not come out because the kids really needed the support the adults could offer:

> I can't accept their sealing themselves off from kids who need their help, with any kind of rationality. Because kids die because of that. That's what it comes down to....When you do that, you're killing me, you're killing our kids, and you're setting up the next 100 years of oppression.[24]

Unlike the other respondents, this teacher was not very forgiving of queer teachers who don't come out. By remaining silent about their sexual orientation, he feels that these teachers are confirming queer students' fears that being queer is so shameful that it should not be spoken about. Silence helps to perpetuate homophobia because it is not being challenged or counteracted with positive information about being queer. In contrast, by being known as gay, this teacher presents himself as a source of support. He said that he had received numerous desperate calls from queer youth, and had saved some of their lives. In addition, other students came to him for help with problems such as unwanted pregnancy, because he had a reputation as being there for students.

He said that not only had he saved kids lives, but also that he was changing the status quo of his entire school and helping all of his students develop critical thinking skills:

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[23] Queer youth are three times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. They also face severe isolation, violence from their families, and high rates of substance abuse. Many face verbal and physical assault in school and from strangers. Twenty-six percent are forced to leave their homes by their families, and many engage in prostitution to survive. For these reasons, queer youth are at high risk for contracting HIV and having unwanted pregnancies. From Hetrick-Martin Institute, Factfile: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth, Photocopy of flyer (New York: 1992).

[24] Respondent #4, interview.

> Students are a lot more open than we think....Given the opportunity to present their own views, they will [do so] very strongly. It gives them practice so that when they go home and they have to confront homophobia..., even if they don't say anything, they know they can think differently. And I think that's really important for kids to know. Because if kids have never been exposed to it, then they have no tools to deal with it. Kids knowing that I'm gay and I'm out in the school means that when they go to the gym, and the coach says "Stop acting like a faggot" (which they don't do anymore in my school), they know they can run up to the coach and say "I'm going to tell Mr. _____ you called me a faggot," and that coach is going to have a heart attack, because he knows I'm going to be down there in a flash.[25]

Considering the rising violence in schools, that most high schools are places of terror for queer youth, and that many queer bashers are teenage men, this teacher's accomplishments are impressive. Adult students who come from cultures where sexual minorities are silenced are in a similar position as these teenagers, and can also benefit from having an out teacher with whom they can discuss sexual orientation issues.

In order to feel wholly integrated and creative, these teachers felt the need to come out. They saw it as helping to create a rapport with their students, and reciprocating the honesty that they expected their students to have. In addition, openly queer students can serve as much-needed role models and provide affirmation for queer students, and encourage an institution's students and staff to rethink their homophobia. The simple statement of one's sexual orientation is a powerful act indeed.

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[25] Ibid.

Positive Experiences with Coming Out to Classes

Aside from the one disaster story, the other respondents who said they came out to students generally reported positive reactions. (This may simply mean that most teachers who sense that the results will be disastrous don't come out, thereby avoiding bad reactions.) These mostly positive results bear out the theory of one teacher, who said:

> I know negative things happen that I haven't experienced...and I haven't done this that often, but...I just really feel strongly that [coming out] can only help in the long run, even though there can be some short-term problems. Again, it depends on the group, but I think if you have a fairly supportive group, I just feel it's really important, if the teacher feels like they're ready to do that.[26]

Depending on whether a class seems supportive, and how prepared the teacher is to come out, coming out can be a very rewarding experience. By giving these examples, my intention is not to judge those teachers who do not come out or who have had miserable experiences with coming out. Rather, it is to see what we can learn from these successful experiences.

These teachers had a variety of strategies for coming out, which partly depended on whom they came out to (everyone, some classes, or just some individuals). Some planned the process very carefully, and some reacted to convenient circumstances. Some integrated their coming out into their curriculum, and some just mentioned it when it seemed relevant.

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[26] Respondent #11, interview.

In the first issue of the GLESOL Newsletter, Elisa Shore wrote about how she came out to her writing class. She had already established a certain amount of trust:

> My students and I had already shared many personal stories through our writing....My students had also taken many risks with their peers and me by exposing stories [such as]:...immigration horror stories...and, common to all students, trying to find an identity in America without losing one's own culture in the process.

Although her class had established this common ground, she still had the same fears that many other teachers do about coming out. She prepared the students by having a discussion about discrimination, then handed out an essay about her coming out process:

> Now I was ready to take my biggest step, to face my imagined nightmare: that my students would drop my class, feel shocked or disgusted having a lesbian teacher and insult and degrade me. Sound unrealistic? Maybe, but that's what went through my mind when I handed out my essay, "A Meeting With My Younger Self:" a dialogue between my present self and myself as a confused 16 year-old struggling to accept my emerging lesbian identity. I prefaced my students' reading of my coming out with a discussion on the concept of discrimination against all minorities and the need for tolerance and respect for all. My students were completely intrigued with this group discussion and seemed to be comfortable with the new information that their teacher was a lesbian!

After this discussion, she left for the TESOL convention and gave her students a chance to respond in writing to her essay. She then wrote responses to the most commonly asked questions, which were: about conflicts with Christianity; whether homosexuality is natural; whether she wanted to have a baby; when she realized

she was a lesbian; and whether one's sexual orientation was really that important.[27]

Shore found the whole experience to be uplifting and validating:

> I realized I had opened the door for change and growth, both within myself and my students; I could never go back. I felt a strange burden being lifted from my being, like a heavy metal chain being removed from around my neck; I would be able to be a whole person in front of my class![28]

The way in which Shore went about coming out helped her students to be more comfortable with that revelation. She first established a rapport with her class, and set a precedent for sharing personal information. Then she created a context for her coming out with the discussion about discrimination. She allowed them time to digest the information before responding. Finally, she gave them a chance to ask questions, which she answered. Of course, they must be given credit for being sensitive to her and willing to talk about the issue.

Another teacher only came out when it seemed to fit into the curriculum logically. He said he comes out "generally, only if they ask. However, if I teach freshman composition I <u>always</u> come out to them. I'm supported in that because it's considered 'multi-culturalism' by the head of my department."[29] He did not specify exactly how he came out and how his students reacted.

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[27] Elisa Shore, "Out of the Closet and into the Classroom," <u>GLESOL Newsletter</u> 1 no. 1 (June 1992): 3-4.

[28] Ibid., p. 3.

[29] Respondent #17, survey, p. 4.

In contrast, several teachers chose to come out more casually. For example, one teacher trainer (who has the advantage of teaching students who speak English well) always makes a reference to his being gay in the first class. For instance, in a writing exercise he may make a list of things he is thinking about, and include "the guy I'm dating right now." After making it known that he his gay, he leaves it up to his students to ask more if they are interested:

> What I find is that teachers [my students] then come to me. I mean, they'll [ask] the questions they need to know more about. In one case, a male teacher...when I came out was shocked, because he liked me, and he didn't ever expect to like gay people. I was probably the first self-identified gay man he'd ever known. And finally, about halfway through the course, he said "I gotta talk to you after the class....I'm really struggling with this."[30]

By mentioning his sexual orientation in a matter-of-fact way, this teacher conveyed the message that it was a normal thing, and allowed his students to take the information however they wanted to. He did not seem as concerned with their reactions as other teachers I surveyed. He and the homophobic teacher began an ongoing dialogue that lasted well past the class, with the teacher reexamining how his teaching might be homophobic.

Two other teachers I surveyed came out to their students spontaneously when a good opportunity presented itself. One bisexual woman set up a general discussion of queer issues, and planned to "play it by ear." She brought in two guest speakers, a lesbian and a gay man, to talk about their experiences. She decided to come out after one of the gay man's comments:

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[30] Respondent #10, interview.

> [A student] asked, "What do you think about bisexuality?"...His response was "I don't think it exists." At which point I [thought], ok, I need to say something. There were three minutes left in the class.... I said, "Well, actually...." [In subsequent classes] we worked it out, we had a good dialog going....I had really good students: they gave me good feedback, and...sent me a thank-you card in the mail.[31]

Ironically, having brought in guest speakers to talk about homophobia, this teacher wound up challenging her guest speaker's biphobia by coming out. She took a big risk by making this statement with no time left in the class to discuss it, but apparently the students had enough faith in her to be willing to continue the dialog in the next class.

Finally, one teacher had a good experience coming out when he had not intended to speak about himself:

> It was quite exciting....We were discussing whether gays and lesbians should have the right to raise or adopt children, and I pretty much stay out of that and try to draw them out and let them speak, and wouldn't have gotten involved in that discussion. But at the end of the class [a student] said [to me], "what do you think?" I thought, gosh, if ever an opportunity was laid before me, that was it, not only to say what I thought but also to tell them that I was gay. And that's what I did do. I just got a real warm response from the students.
>
> And there had been one...Korean woman who was really bright and who was very progressive but had made some semi-negative comments about gays and lesbians....She came up at the end of class, and...she said "oh, this is really a good class."....I felt like oh, wow, I'd gotten through to her! Everyone afterwards came up and...they thought it was a good class and they appreciated the honest discussion, and then they said it again in their final evaluations. And a couple of the women just really felt much freer to speak about gay issues. That's when [one] said "oh, my husband and I

[31] Respondent #2, interview.

> went to The Wedding Banquet, and we just thought it was such a good film." They had gone two or three times, and they wanted me to see it for sure.[32]

With little preparation, this teacher received a very favorable response to his coming out. Perhaps the information was not as charged because the teacher was male and the students were female, so they would not see it as an advance upon them. Also, because the topic arose so naturally within the class context, his revelation may have seemed appropriate. The students appreciated the opportunity to talk about the formerly taboo subject of gay culture. It is interesting to note that many students are supportive of queers (whether they are queer or not), but do not talk about it because they take their cues from the silence of peers, teachers and others.

These teachers had divergent ways of coming out, but all met with positive results. What they all seemed to have in common was that they had a good rapport with their students, who were reasonably sensitive; they put the information about themselves into a meaningful context; they came out under circumstances that were not very threatening to their students; they allowed their students to respond; and they were willing to risk whatever reactions they might encounter. Still, these conditions do not guarantee a wonderful experience, as evidenced by the teacher with the traumatic story. Teachers who come out must be prepared for the worst. However, in the examples above, the teachers were met with several good results, including feeling more whole and freer to speak

[32] Respondent #11, interview.

about themselves; deepening their relationship with their students; educating their students about homophobia and queer culture; and allowing students more freedom to talk about issues like this. The decision to come out to a class is one that each individual must make, depending on one's comfort level with one's sexual orientation; how good a rapport has been established with students; how students are likely to react; and what the consequences might be.

Providing Support for Individual Queer Students

Some teachers felt it was not appropriate to come out to classes, but were willing to talk to individual students. Usually these were queer students, who either asked the teachers if they were gay, or who ran into the teachers in queer settings outside of school.

One teacher occasionally sees students in gay bars. They are usually surprised to see him and are full of questions:

> They always want to know--"Oh, I can't believe you're gay! What's it like? How come you don't tell the students?" All of the questions are asked. Sometimes they're scared. But more [often] than not,...they handle it very well. They handle it the same way any American would; it's just that they don't speak English. If they're already out, then it's much easier for them than if they're not out. It seems it's difficult to come out in another country [the US] when you don't speak English, to go to the gay bars.[33]

By coming out to these students, this teacher can help them to negotiate U.S. queer culture. He understands the difficult position they are in, as double

[33] Respondent #5, interview.

outsiders: "foreigners" and queers in a strange culture. This type of cross-cultural sharing is not something that most heterosexual teachers would be able to provide (nor would most queer teachers in the closet be willing to risk being revealed by speaking to the students about being queer).

Peter Voeller, an international student advisor, wrote about the fact that he maintains a queer-friendly atmosphere in his office and comes out to students if they ask him:

> I have the rainbow flag..., my lavender "Everyone has a sexual orientation" button..., an "Equal Rights Not Special Rights" flyer...and the University of Washington's "Valuing Diversity" poster...(with male/male and female/female signs on it). These are my subtle clues that mine is a gay/lesbian/bisexual friendly office.

Having counseled several students over the years about being queer, he relates the story of one Thai student who asked Voeller if he was gay. When he answered "yes," the student told him that he was also gay. The student then asked:

> "I've been here for six months," he continued, "and I haven't been able to meet anyone like me. Where can I go?"
>
> Fortunately, I know the community well enough to be able to give him something more substantial than bars or gay hang out areas. "What would a regular het advisor have been able to tell him?" I wonder.
>
> I told him about POCAAN, the People of Color Against AIDS Network, which includes blacks, Hispanics and Asians. I mentioned the bookstores where he could go to read about other "people like me" and the SGN (Seattle Gay News). I told him to be careful. He left feeling not so alone and hopeful about meeting more people.

When the student returned a month later:

> He was beaming and full of thanks for the information and contacts I had given him. He'd gone to a POCAAN meeting and met a lot of nice people. He was planning to volunteer and help out in their community outreach programs. He'd bought some books and picked up a copy of the [Seattle Gay News]. He was gushing about how accepting people in the United States were of gays. I flinched and told him that they may be more accepting than in some places, but not to think that everyone feels that way. I again cautioned him to be careful. He left me feeling for the first time like a role model.

Voeller helped the student to transform his isolation into an active and healthy involvement in the queer community. He also gave him some perspective and prepared him to be able to deal with the homophobia he would encounter. In return, Voeller felt that his "queer expertise" was useful, and he was proud to be a role model, that his being gay was valued so highly by a student.[34]

The essay also contains the student's version of the incident, which he begins with:

> Nobody can live without being given care, advice and understanding. Most people try to find someone who can give those things to them, and I am one of those people. I am also gay and I had been looking for someone who I could talk to about being gay in the United States.

After speaking to Voeller, the student said:

> This was the first time for me to [be] very so comfortable since coming to Seattle. I was happy to meet him and I told him a lot about myself. He gave me lots of advice....After I lift [*sic*] his office, I felt more comfortable and had more hope about living in Seattle. I thought that now I could find a person who I could talk to and who could give me some advice. I never felt lonely any more.

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[34] Peter Voeller, "One Reward of Being an 'Out' International Student Advisor" Unpublished version, n.d.

With this information and renewed hope, the student went out to meet people in the queer community. He said of his experience, "after I met these people, I felt stronger and I want to do anything to support the gay community. Because I believe, 'We are gay and we ar right'" [*sic*]. From the student's perspective, having an advisor to talk to about being gay was an enormous boost to his self-image, and helped him to overcome his isolation and become part of a community.[35]

Queer students desperately need role models, yet most queer teachers are prevented from playing this role because of homophobia. Teachers lose out because they cannot openly refer to all of their knowledge about and understanding of queer issues, and queer students remain isolated and afraid.

On the other hand, it is possible to support queer students without coming out to them. The teacher who had a bad experience with a class did have a positive experience in working with the first queer student who came out to her:

> I was thrilled to be part of helping her voice this and once she saw how receptive I was and non-judgmental, she wrote about it all the time. Every paper dealt with the topic and her writing really improved, I think, because she cared so much about the subject. I didn't come out back...somehow it didn't seem appropriate to go "me too." But I was able to be an informed supportive audience and I think this was a good experience for both of us.[36]

By being accepting and by encouraging this student to find her voice, this teacher helped her student to use written English for self-exploration (a writing teacher's

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Respondent #12, written interview.

dream come true). Had the student been met with indifference or hostility, it is unlikely that the writing class would have been so meaningful to her personal development. For the teacher, this experience seemed to heal some of the wounds from the negative reactions to her coming out to the other class.

As a caveat, some of these respondents cautioned that although teachers may recognize that some of their students are queer, it is important not to push them, and to allow them to come for help when they are ready. Otherwise, it could be a frightening experience for a student who is not ready to talk about her or his sexual orientation with a teacher, or who may view the teacher's coming out as a come-on. In addition, a student may not yet be aware of her or his sexual orientation, or the teacher's perception may be completely wrong.

Coming out to students is a difficult decision that can result in great rewards or disastrous consequences. It is something that queer teachers should put some thought into, whether they never intend to do it, consciously work it into their lesson plans, or take advantage of spontaneous opportunities to come out.[37] Most of the teachers I surveyed would like more support in coming out. This support could come from other queer teachers who have successfully come out; from administrators who are willing to back them up; and from heterosexual colleagues who consistently bring up homophobia and queer culture in their own

[37] For a good discussion of coming out at the college/university level (not in TESOL), including several studies about teachers' reasons and methods for coming out, see Jeffrey Ringer, ed., "Coming Out in the Classroom," Part 5 in Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 289-334.

classes, so that the burden does not fall only upon queer teachers, who have the most to lose. Again, it is possible to effectively address homophobia in class discussion without coming out, and coming out is not always necessary or a good idea. I would like to encourage teachers to come out if they can, but to realize the magnitude of the risk and to be prepared for the possible consequences.

In the next chapter I will look at what assets these teachers bring to their classrooms. I will explore how these teachers see their sexual orientation as contributing to their teaching ability, or whether they think it is irrelevant. I will also examine how they are creating innovative curricula that deal with issues of sexuality and queer culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTRIBUTIONS THAT QUEER ESOL TEACHERS MAKE

It is easy to look at the problems faced by queer ESOL teachers, and perhaps acknowledge that it is wrong to discriminate against us. However, what is often overlooked is the ways in which being queer enhances the teaching ability of ESOL teachers, and how queer teachers have contributed to the profession of TESOL. We have already seen several ways in which respondents have used their sexual orientations as an asset. Through coming out, they have provided desperately-needed role models and support for queer students. As one teacher alluded to, homophobia is deadly: many queer adolescents die from suicide, substance abuse and AIDS, in part due to a lack of role models and support.[1] Adult queer students also face isolation and need support. Teachers who come out have in some cases successfully challenged the homophobia of their entire institutions. They have advocated for equal rights and benefits on the job. They have opened up new avenues of communication among their colleagues and students, and allowed others the freedom to talk about previously silenced issues. They have started a debate within TESOL about the place of sexual orientation and queer culture in the classroom. All of these actions have far-reaching effects.

In addition to these contributions, however, are the quieter, everyday ways in which these individuals are reinventing their roles as teachers, the methods they

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[1] See chapter three, "Why Some Teachers Do Come Out to Students."

use, and the content that they teach. When asked on the survey, almost all of the respondents thought that being queer contributed to their teaching ability. Most explained that it made them more sensitive to their students' needs, because they understood what it was like to be an outsider within this culture. Several of those who faced multiple oppressions said that their combination of experiences added to their understanding and sensitivity. Within their classes, many of these teachers are introducing innovative ways of dealing with the issues of sexual orientation and queer culture, while most of their heterosexual colleagues chose to ignore these issues.

Outside the classroom, some of these teachers are making a further impact by training other teachers to include queer issues in their curricula. Others are questioning traditional pedagogical and linguistic research that does not take into account the existence or sensibilities of queers. A few volunteer with queer youth through local organizations. These wide-ranging contributions are being made by both teachers who are very public about their sexual orientation, and those who choose not to come out.

Understanding and Sensitivity

When asked if they thought being queer contributed to their teaching abilities, all but one person said yes. One was not sure. When I asked the question in a negative way, "Do you think that your sexual orientation is irrelevant to your teaching?" one person said that it is irrelevant "for 99% of the time."

Paradoxically, he did think that being queer contributed to his teaching ability because it helped him "identify with minorities."[2] The one who was unsure whether being queer contributed to his ability did not think it was irrelevant. The rest of the respondents did feel that being queer was an asset.

The most common explanation given was that being queer made them more aware of the experiences of minorities, of what it is like to be oppressed, silenced, and made an outsider in their own societies. One lesbian said "I know how it feels to live on the fringes of society and to never 'fit in.' To be made invisible and silenced. To silence myself."[3] Those who faced multiple oppressions felt that this gave them added insights and sensitivity. While I don't want to equate the experience of a queer native-speaking teacher with that of an ESL student, I agree that queer teachers can have a certain understanding that heterosexuals may not share.

For example, several of the men felt that being gay made them more sensitive to the needs of their female students. One male teacher said:

> It's not impossible for a straight man to be just as sensitive in [these] areas. But...being gay has placed me in the position of feeling not empowered,...powerless,...oppressed, or that I can't really say what I want to say in a lot of situations. And that definitely carries over to the classroom. When I see that maybe one of the female students is very quiet and/or shy, that it could just be because she has a male teacher and she's uncomfortable with that. So I will make it a point to call on that person more, to give [her] the opportunity to talk, to make [her] feel more comfortable in that situation, so [she] can express [herself]. At least give [her] the

[2] Respondent #13, survey, p. 6.

[3] Respondent #12, survey, p. 5.

> opportunity to--[she] may not want to. But more often than not [she] end[s] up by the end of the term being much more vocal.

His interest in gender equality goes beyond his particular classroom: he also researches gender-based differences of participation in class. Another male teacher concurred: "The women have learned that especially in my class, they have the chance to be what they want to be, and I'll support them in that."[4]

In a related way, another teacher felt that because he did not fit into the typical macho stereotype of straight men, he presented an alternative male role model, which was beneficial for his adolescent students:

> I have a really special view of things...because of homosexuality. There's a special sensitivity that I have that not a lot of [straight] men...have. I just think it's important to have men out there that have that certain sensitivity...even though a lot of the public may not know the cause or the motivation of that, at least they see this [man who is] caring and loving....Both female and male students need to see that....It comes across in my teaching,...walking down the hall,...in everything I do.[5]

Both male and female students benefit from seeing that men can be emotionally open and sensitive. Too often teachers present sex role stereotypes that are limiting and not reflective of people's potential as well-rounded individuals.

The high school teacher who encourages his female students to speak their minds also thinks that he makes a good role model for his students. His constant questioning of the status quo teaches students to think for themselves:

> My presence and my reaction has driven...straight male teachers to be <u>real</u> careful, especially knowing that kids will come back to check

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[4] Respondent #5, interview. Respondent #4, interview.

[5] Respondent #3, interview.

> stuff out with me. We had a zoology teacher who told them...that mothers could not give AIDS to their children through breast milk. I sent him a message that said "stop spreading misinformation or I'll have you lose your license." Another history teacher had stated that no homosexuals had ever done anything famous. So we started with Alexander the Great and went down the list. So [the other teachers have] learned that if they say something in a class, my kids are going to be ears open to it, because they've learned to question, because I'm constantly questioning.[6]

This type of questioning is a sophisticated skill that many students never learn in high school.

Another teacher has used his experience with being gay and his knowledge of Japanese culture to develop a sensitivity toward outsiders within Japanese society. This translates into a rare cultural understanding of an issue that some of his students face:

> For example, I'm real careful about the issue of *burakumin* or *eta*, a group in Japan who are in many ways just like gays. They're the untouchables, yet nobody knows who they are--they're invisible.... They're a class of people who...a hundred years ago or more...had... "low class" jobs. They often lived in the same community and had the same last name. And their names carry on, and this stigma against them continues today in Japan. Even now, large companies when they're hiring people or when someone is looking for a prospective marriage partner,...there is always a check to make sure they're not *burakumin*....
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> ...The *burakumin* is one group of thousands of groups that appear in all of our classrooms all of the time that can in some cases separate us and not bring us together. And I think being gay has helped to empower me in some ways and especially recently to use differences as not a separating thing but something that brings me closer to my students and my students closer to each other.[7]

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[6] Respondent #4, interview.

[7] Respondent #11, interview.

Because he is so aware of what it feels like to be invisible and stigmatized, this teachers uses his knowledge of this outsider group to better understand his students and to teach them to appreciate and respect differences.

Facing homophobia has given many of these teachers an understanding of being an outsider. In addition to homophobia, however, several respondents reported that facing other forms of oppression has also contributed to their teaching abilities. As one teacher summed it up, all of her experiences have made her a more tolerant person, and being bisexual is a part of that (she refers to this as being "gay"):

> I just think that all of my experiences, taken together, have made me a better teacher than I would have been, for instance, had I never moved, and lived my life in one place, and never known anything about gays, and never travelled....Being a woman is an oppressive position in our society, and being Jewish, and being gay, ...all of these different things...certainly have to make me a more tolerant person....Knowing what it means to be oppressed helps me to...be more understanding of others.[8]

Sexual orientation, along with one's other identities (Jewish, woman), play a fundamental role in how one views the world, and one's understanding of others.

Another Jewish teacher felt that her experiences have given her a certain strength, which makes her a better teacher. She said of her work with immigrant students:

> Being a lesbian and being a Jew,...knowing what it's like to be oppressed, it's very easy to understand what students have gone through....I get so much shit, even from my own parents, about being gay. I know what it's like to be treated like shit because of who you

[8] Respondent #6, interview.

> are...and I just read about the violence, read about the gays who really have so few rights. I know what that's like, so I think I can understand what it's like to come here and not speak English very well, and not really be a part of the culture yet....It's made me stronger, because I've had to learn how to stand up for myself....So in a way I think it helps me discipline students sometimes, or I just feel strong and powerful in the classroom.[9]

Teachers know the value of being able to maintain control over their classrooms, which is a difficult feat for many, especially women. This woman uses the strength that has come from her life experiences to be a strong teacher. Her strength is not oppressive, however: it is tempered by a genuine identification with her students and their struggles.

Another Jewish lesbian said that her experiences with oppression had given her certain coping skills, which she tries to pass on to her immigrant students who will encounter harsh realities in this country:

> I have had to fight for my rights, and I don't have the same rights as heterosexual society, so I have to educate these [students]. It's my job: I'm an educator. So...I tell them that, "you know, there are some people out here who don't like you, because you're an immigrant"....And for the most part, the Mexicans and the Central Americans... understand it very well. The Russians have no idea yet. They don't get it. And to explain it to them, "You're going to really have to work on your pronunciation, because...they're going to say, 'Forget it. You're an immigrant? We're not going to give you a job.'" And that nothing's going to be handed down to [them]. The Russians think "give it to me, give it to me," because that's the way their society was....Now everything's completely chaotic, so they don't know what to do. They're in this totally new culture..., so you have to educate them about it.[10]

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[9] Respondent #1A, interview.

[10] Respondent #1B, interview.

This teacher has a certain toughness born of having to struggle against oppression. Someone who has been handed everything in life would be hard-pressed to teach these Russian students survival skills.

One teacher uses his own life as an example to his students, proof that they can also survive. He extends his work beyond the classroom to volunteering with queer youth at a local community center. Since he is of mixed race, was poor and troubled as child, and English was his second language, he started out under similar circumstances as his inner-city students and the queer youth he works with:

> They see that I've survived and made it....Here I am mid-forties, and I'm a teacher. I'm actually a professional, and I once was like these kids: I was once a punk drug-addict hustler on the streets of New York, and I've survived...[,] I've actually "made it." I'm not a millionaire or anything,...but I've actually survived to do something. I think that's really impressive to kids because they don't see themselves beyond the immediacy of the moment doing anything because they're being repressed by so many other things. So it's difficult for them to see a future in which they're actually going to do something. [They think] "he was this and he was that and he's doing all this stuff, and he still is alive! In my country they would have shot him."
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> ...It helps them realize that that's a possibility for them and it's a possibility for people they know within their own culture....I think that what happens is those kids who are...undiscovered, discovering, or have discovered their sexuality, it creates the opportunity so that they know that there is the possibility for them to exist without being alone. And for kids that's one of the biggest, scariest things in the world--to know you feel different from somebody else and nobody else feels like you. The biggest drive is for all kids to conform.

This teacher is a role model both for his queer students and for his heterosexual students who are struggling with the same poverty and oppression that he has overcome. For young queer people, the message that they are not alone can be

enough to convince them that life is worth living. This teacher presents them with an example of hope.

Another teacher, whose students are adults, also found that her class background has helped her to bond with some of her students. Having come from an impoverished background, been on welfare and put herself through college by working as a cleaning woman, she says:

> I find that my class background, even though I am educated now, really defines who I am more than anything else....I had this class made up of wives of...post graduate students (who took it for granted they had the right to be educated) and a group of Mexican and Panamanian immigrants (people who were the only ones in their family to ever try to achieve a higher education). The class quickly divided itself down the middle, and my loyalties were with the Spanish speakers, for class reasons more than anything. I realized I identified with them, understood what it felt like to be struggling with the whole idea of getting educated, trying to find an identity as an educated person while not losing the sense of self....
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> ...The working class students knew I was different and sought to get close to me through making jokes, through a kind of community of sharing stories, and they loved the variety and were eager to do something less rigid than the textbook.

Because of her class background, she was able to identify with her immigrant students, and provide for them an engaging class.[11]

However, the middle-class students did not trust her because they sensed that she was different from them: they "were constantly questioning my authority as if they were trying to trick me, didn't trust me." She therefore wound up conducting two separate lesson plans, with the middle class students going "step by

[11] Respondent #12, written interview.

step through the reader" and the immigrants "reading Sandra Cisneros, thrilled to find someone like themselves in print, and sharing stories from their own experience." Her outsider status thus was beneficial to some students, but made others distrustful:

> I think the fact that I know what it's like to be alienated, to be an outsider in many ways, makes me identify with student outsiders and makes me suspect to the insiders. Class is the biggest reason for this, but I think being a lesbian and the mother of a biracial child are also factors in the sense that I don't ever expect to be an insider. Don't you think this is why there are so many gay and lesbian ESL teachers?

This teacher suggests that gays and lesbians are drawn to teaching ESL because they can relate well to their students, who are outsiders in this culture. However, as her example demonstrates, they may not be able to relate to all of their students, because some students want to learn the dominant culture, and are distrustful of teachers who do not exemplify it.[12]

Given the complex differences between various types of oppressions, and the ways in which each individual's experiences are unique, we must be cautious about clumsily applying the lessons of a teacher's experience to the understanding of a student's experiences. Being queer, and/or belonging to another oppressed group, can make one aware of what it is like to be an outsider, but not necessarily aware of the specific nature of someone else's experience. One teacher, using the example of his time in the Peace Corps, cautioned that it's not always a good idea to draw parallels between his experience and that of his students:

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[12] Ibid.

> Because they're in it right now and they're experiencing it, and you're not....It's just like someone who's gone through a trauma, and then someone else says, "Oh, I know exactly how you feel," and [the response is], "No, you don't know how I feel." So I'm a little careful with that, saying "I know how you feel." I think it's better one-on-one than in front of a class. But I think it's useful for them to know you've been where they are, but not to make too big a deal out of it, because you can never be exactly where they are.[13]

While it is useful for these teachers to draw upon their experiences as outsiders within their own cultures to gain empathy for their students, they should not assume that they know exactly what their students are experiencing.

Not being out also handicaps the extent to which a teacher can apply his or her experiences to a classroom discussion. Cynthia Nelson spoke about this dilemma in her first TESOL presentation:

> I often regret that I cannot openly speak with knowledge and authority on a subject that is more than a subject--it is my life.
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> I feel this about specifically gay issues and also when many other types of discrimination come up, which they do all the time in our field. I have facilitated and observed countless class discussions about cultural assimilation, about being a minority, about biculturalism, about prejudice, about passing--these are issues my... students bring up again and again.
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> But I do not feel free to spontaneously share the relevant experiential knowledge and personal understanding of such issues that I have developed as a lesbian woman. I choose my words carefully, trying to preserve the gist of what I want to say while removing my anecdotes or observations from real life. In other words, I de-gay things all the time. I remove myself, my friends, my family, my community, my culture from the picture.[14]

Homophobia forces many queer teachers to speak in vague generalities about subjects about which they have specific, personal knowledge. In addition, since it

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[13] Respondent #7, interview.

[14] Cynthia Nelson, "Heterosexism in ESL," 145-146.

is difficult for low-proficiency students to relate to information that is not connected to concrete examples, much of the impact of these explanations is probably lost.

Innovative Curricula

While most texts and curricula utterly ignore the existence of queers and homophobia, most of the respondents have translated their personal knowledge and experiences into more inclusive, innovative classroom content. One teacher explains that we must look at not only which culture we teach, but how we teach it and what implications it has:

> When I have speakers come in, I let them do the talking about their own lives, because one of the main themes I try to emphasize is...we've met a whole bunch of people from all parts of American life, and our common denominator is that we're all people....Plus there's an added layer of understanding those people in American society who are marginalized....The whole ESL process is not just about learning English, it's about acculturation. And [it's] shoving a particular culture down people's throats if you're unaware of what you're doing...if you're unaware of what the meta-message is.[15]

Since this teacher's queer culture is usually not acknowledged in the classroom, she has a clear understanding of the politics of which culture is presented as "American culture." Teachers who leave out the ten percent or more of the population who are queer are not giving their students a full picture of the many cultures that make up U.S. culture, and are doing a disservice to their students who are queer or have queer friends or family members.

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[15] Respondent #2, interview.

Of the people I interviewed, sixteen said that they dealt with queer issues and homophobia on a regular basis in their classes. One said that she almost never dealt with it, and two said they did not deal with it at all. Some teachers were reactive: they dealt with the issues only when students brought them up, in the form of questions or homophobic remarks. Others were proactive: they included these issues in their lesson plans. Of the proactive teachers, there was a range of strategies for bringing up the subject. Some integrated discussion of sexual minorities into certain contexts; others included queer examples throughout the course (e.g. mentioning queer families in a unit on "family life"); and others devoted specific times to talking about queer issues and homophobia. To focus these discussions, teachers used a variety of approaches, including using texts, films, media articles, guest speakers, and their own lives if they chose to come out.

Of the two respondents who talked about teaching these issues in EFL, one said she rarely did it and one reported being met with flat denial. The first said: "I almost never bring it into the classroom. If civil rights issues are being discussed (which is rare in EFL) then I will present gay and lesbian issues as a part of it."[16] Given that there was hardly a recognition of the need to talk about civil rights in her arena, it is not surprising that this teacher felt unable to talk about queer rights specifically (not to mention that she had no rights as a queer). The second teacher said: "When I asked in Prague, they said they didn't have homosexuals in their country. I talked about problems of homosexuals in this

[16] Respondent #16, survey, p. 4.

country."[17] This was a creative way of conveying information without threatening a basic belief of her students. Because EFL teachers are not in their "home turf," they seem to be much more vulnerable and less able to openly confront these issues, depending of course upon their particular setting.

Most of the ESL teachers did bring queer content into their classes in some form, however. One teacher spoke about why he felt it was important on a pedagogical and personal level to bring up queer issues in his classroom:

> I feel that a lot of the other teachers will talk about sexism and...racism in the classroom, but then they stop there. I like to talk about all of the issues. I don't feel that those are the only three. We certainly end up talking about religion,...physically challenged people, so I try to run a wider gamut....For me it is more personal because I am gay, and I want the students to have an understanding of what that means. Because...[in] a lot of countries that they come from, it's not mentioned,...and I know that some of those students are gay and lesbian.[18]

Queer students rarely see their own lives reflected in the classroom, and heterosexual students also benefit from a discussion of these issues.

Some teachers took the approach of bringing up these issues in response to students' questions or homophobic remarks. For instance, one teacher spoke about intervening when a queer student was being harassed by the other students: "One time there was this very flaming guy from Mexico and some very aggressive Brazilians, and I told them to just knock it off. 'Just stop that now.'"[19] By

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[17] Respondent #14, survey, p. 5.

[18] Respondent #5, interview.

[19] Respondent #1B, interview.

protecting this queer student from harassment, she made the class safer for him and set a standard that she was not going to tolerate homophobia directed at a student. Another teacher always tries to counteract negative statements about queers with positive ones:

> If someone says "Oooooo, there are all those gays and lesbians here," [then] I'll say "Yes, it's really wonderful that there are so many gays and lesbians here. It's such a diverse culture and you can meet so many different types of people."[20]

These small interventions encourage students to rethink their assumptions that everyone is homophobic and that being queer is bad. By breaking silence like this, these teachers challenge homophobia and create an environment that acknowledges queer culture and students.

Other teachers confront these issues in more structured ways. Some teachers who don't want to come out and who want to deflect homophobia from themselves bring in queer guest speakers. One such teacher named Angelika Kasten wrote in the GLESOL Newsletter about how she taught these issues without coming out:

> My decision to have guest speakers as "experts" took a lot of pressure off me to come out and at the same time allowed me to introduce the topic "safely" for the first time in such an extensive way....
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> As a preparation for the visit I used letters to "Dear Abby"...in which lesbians and gays respond to Abby's question: "Are you glad to be gay?" By reading these letters the students learned some basic information about the diverse lives of lesbians and gays. The students responded with statements about what they had learned through these letters and with many questions which I

[20] Respondent #1A, interview.

> answered as far as I felt comfortable. For the more intricate and sometimes for me embarrassing questions I referred them to the guest speakers coming the next day. New vocabulary such as "closet, coming out, sissy, tomboy" was also introduced in this class. Additionally, I taught the concept of "tolerance" and asked them for some sensitivity when asking questions referring to the speakers' private sphere.

Her preparations and inviting the guest speakers brought good results:

> The lesbian and gay guest speakers told their coming out stories and refuted common stereotypes.....[They] pointed out that they were not there to convert students, and that this common prejudice was false....This first disclaimer/ clarification started to make the students comfortable enough to ask questions....
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> ...Humor really helped to break the ice and to make everybody feel more comfortable. One student's statement confirmed my decision not to come out. He declared that lesbians were really bisexual because they used dildos....I was embarrassed, [but]...the speaker just plainly negate[d] that statement.
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> At the end of the lesson the students expressed more interest in the topic and most of them had changed their opinions about homosexuals. Most of them said that this occasion was the first time that they had met a homosexual. This obviously was one of the moments in which I wanted to come out to them.....
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> For me coming out is a neverending process and this was the first step in the classroom. Other steps will follow. I can highly recommend this approach as a "safe" start for other teachers in a similar situation.[21]

By using guest speakers, she could effectively deal with the issues with a minimum of personal risk, and at the same time gauge how her students would be likely to react to her coming out.

Another ESL teacher, Tom Meyer, gave a demonstration at TESOL 1994 about how he uses guest speakers to talk about racism, sexism and homophobia. In his syllabus, he covers the general topic of discrimination, of which

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[21] Angelika Kasten, "Teaching Gay/Lesbian Issues Without Coming Out," GLESOL Newsletter 1 no. 1 (Jun. 1992): 6.

homophobia is one part. Meyer usually asks members of the university's gay, lesbian and bisexual student organization to be the guest speakers. Before bringing in these speakers, like Kasten he prepares his students with readings, films and/or discussions. He also prepares the speakers for the types of questions that students might ask, and warns them that students might not know how to phrase questions politely. During the presentations, Meyer takes notes on cultural information, vocabulary, and idioms that are used. He then incorporates these into a follow-up discussion. Finally, he has students either write an essay or give an oral presentation about the topic. Meyer feels that this lesson plan takes the burden off of himself for coming out; allows the students to talk to "real Americans" and gain cultural information; and provides good practice in all four skill areas (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).[22]

Like Meyer, several of my respondents chose to integrate discussion of homophobia and queer culture into some larger context. One teacher was working with teenage students who were naturally very interested in sexuality in general. She began by drawing a bubble chart[23] with "family," which led to "sex," which led to "homosexuality." She got a mixed reaction from her students:

> They all wanted to talk about everything that was controversial, and one of the things I did have down...[was] "homosexuality."...The reaction was kind of funny, because there was this one French boy

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[22] Thomas Meyer, "Confronting Racism, Sexism and Homophobia in the ESL Classroom," Demonstration given at the annual TESOL conference, Baltimore, Maryland, March 11, 1994.

[23] In a bubble chart, one main idea is written down and circled. Related ideas are drawn as bubbles connected to the main idea with branches. Subsequent ideas branch out of each bubble. This is a common brainstorming technique.

> who really wanted to talk about what it meant in the U.S....He was either feeling very open-minded...or he was questioning [his orientation] and wanted to talk about what gay families were like in the U.S. It made the...Spanish girl in the class very uncomfortable to talk about it....In fact [she] even resorted to [saying]...something nasty to...one of the...boys in the class. I think she said "fag."...And then she looked at me, like she knew she was not supposed to say it...and I did not take her out on it, and I suppose I should have. You know, it's one of those things where you don't know what to do in the situation....I think we might have talked about how queers are perceived in different cultures, and...about Japan and how they're not very open to that....[The Japanese girls] were all a little uncomfortable about it, although not as much as I expected, considering that...[in Japan] they...don't talk about sex in school at all.[24]

This teacher was in a difficult position, because student reactions varied so much, according to the students' cultures. Homophobic name-calling is not uncommon, even among adult students. It is interesting that the student who said "fag" seemed to be waiting for the teacher to chastise her for violating some rule. Presented with an opportunity for countering homophobia, this teacher did not feel prepared to confront the student. It is difficult to know how to allow students to express their opinions, while at the same time requiring some basic level of respect for one another.[25]

Another teacher chooses to place queer issues in the context of either "co-cultures" or AIDS, depending on the type of class and which topic students select. He prefers the term "co-cultures" to "subcultures," because it does not have the

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[24] Respondent #9, interview.

[25] For a good discussion about dealing with homophobic name-calling among children, see Leonore Gordon, "What Do We Say When We Hear 'Faggot?'" Special issue of the Interracial Books for Children Bulletin 14 (1983: New York): 3-4. The article, which contains lesson plans, can be obtained from Interracial Books for Children, 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

connotation of inferiority. For example, if in one class students choose to learn about AIDS, the teacher has a local organization for people of color with AIDS give a presentation, in which they superficially talk about sexual orientation. In another class this teacher may approach queer issues from a cultural standpoint: "if they do choose 'co-cultures in the U.S.,' then we'll definitely talk about gay culture." If it's appropriate to the context that students choose, this teacher covers sexual orientation or queer culture.[26]

While some teachers put the discussion of queer issues into a greater context such as discrimination, sex or co-cultures, others choose to devote more time to the topic in its own right. For example, one teacher was invited into the class of a colleague, who had arranged a two-week unit on gay issues:

> I was wearing a pin at the time, "Straight but not narrow," and she asked if she could [bring it in to her class]. She asked them what...the sentence [meant]. They broke the sentence down and talked about it....She brought in the idiom "on the straight and narrow". They commented, "oh yeah, we've seen that before." She said "yeah, you've seen _____ wear it," and brought me into the class that way. She said this pin represents support or solidarity....They talked about what other things they'd seen, [like] t-shirts, what it means to support a belief, whether or not you participate in it, and they talked about homophobia. And then she had them watching news clips, all sorts of things, and they had a really good discussion....
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> Also she invited me into the class and another teacher who was out with the students (I didn't explicitly come out--I just went along.) We watched [The Times of Harvey Milk and]...talked about it in class....She said to me "I thought you might be interested in seeing how the kids dealt with this," and she said she wanted them to see

[26] Respondent #7, interview.

> that she wasn't the only teacher who talked about it. We all told the kids they could talk to us about anything if they wanted to.[27]

This comprehensive unit served several purposes: it educated students about these issues; gave them a basic understanding of political activism; and let them know that they had someone to talk to privately about their sexual orientation. By inviting in her colleagues, this teacher gave more weight and legitimacy to the issue, and created more support for herself and the other teachers.

The results of this unit were both positive and negative. It had a marked effect on the students:

> These were mostly Asian students, though not all of them. In the beginning they had very strict phrases that they would use [like] "well, it's wrong because..."--this sort of memorized theories that they had. After a little while, they started to loosen up, and then towards the end,...maybe some of them started to rethink their opinions, others to qualify their opinions, be a little bit more knowledgeable about what they were talking about, and see it as a human issue, not just words that were passed down to them, how you should believe.

In addition to gaining knowledge about the topic, these students also began to use critical thinking skills, and to understand the relation of abstract statements to human beings. However, one of the invited teachers may have suffered because of her involvement and outspokenness:

> There were one or two who were totally out, and one of them was the women's studies teacher. She made a really big thing about being there for the students to talk about these issues, and of course right after I left, her position was missing funds, and that sort of thing. It's kind of sad.... She was funded by a grant and I think that her funds did run out, but...they never made the effort to find a place for her afterwards.

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[27] Respondent #6, interview.

While it is difficult to determine whether or not this teacher was discriminated against, had her school truly valued the very important work she was doing, they probably would have made more of an effort to retain her. At least she and the other teachers made a significant impact on their students' thinking about queer issues.[28]

Whether a teacher chooses to deal with the topic as a whole unit or as part of a larger context, choosing appropriate materials is difficult. There is a dearth of ESL materials that even acknowledge the existence of queers, let alone deal with the issues of sexual orientation, homophobia and queer culture. As a part of a colloquium at TESOL 1994, three women discussed texts that include queer issues. For example, Jan Smith mentioned Grammar Dimensions Book 3, which vaguely refers to Matt and Jeff, who are "roommates" and live in San Francisco; and which has a news article about an AIDS activist, and The Multicultural Workshop, which shows a picture of a gay family.[29] (A respondent also mentioned Developing Reading Skills, which depicts a gay family.) Susanna MacKaye and Roseanne Wijesinghe (a lesbian/heterosexual teaching team) use the film Torch Song Trilogy in conjunction with other films covered in The American Picture Show (which does not deal with queer issues). Tom Meyer, whose work with guest speakers is mentioned above, suggests films like Fried

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[28] Ibid.

[29] However, in other sections of this textbook, the authors assume that students are heterosexual and want to get married.

Green Tomatoes and The Color Purple.[30] As I discussed in chapter one, the TESOL Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force is trying to convince publishers to incorporate queer issues into their texts.

Given the scarcity of relevant ESOL materials, all of the respondents reported using material from other genres. As discussed above, many use popular films and guest speakers. There are a limited but growing number of books that can be used in an ESOL classroom.

For example, one teacher has students read a young adult book that has gay, lesbian or bisexual themes. She then has them discuss the book in small groups, then with the entire class. They generate questions for guest speakers who come the next time. This teacher also mentioned an innovative way of using typical textbooks that only mention heterosexual couples in a chapter on relationships:

> [I] constantly weave in there the notion that there are many different models...[of] relationships, and the fact that the way that they present it in the book, which is all about straight people who eventually get married, is not the way that everybody in the world does it. In fact when I have the students do an exercise where they would pair randomly with someone else in the class [and pretend to be in a relationship], I [made] sure they were ok about it if they drew same-sex names. I ended up with two pairs of women, and they were fine about it. I said "I don't want you to pretend that you're in a straight relationship....Talk about the added dimension: are you going to tell you parents about things? What are you going to do?" One of the women ...was fairly sophisticated...and said,

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[30] Jan Smith, Susanna MacKaye and Roseanne Wijesinghe, "Gay and Lesbian Concerns for ESL in Higher Education," Colloquium at the annual TESOL conference, Baltimore, Maryland, March 12, 1994. Thomas Meyer, "Confronting Racism, Sexism and Homophobia." For complete information about these texts, see appendix four.

> "Well, we're going to present ourselves as just being roommates to our families, and then we'll be ok."

This role-playing expands the students' information about relationships and helps them to empathize with the struggles that same-sex couples face.[31]

Another teacher employs a wide range of texts in his high school classes. He uses Audre Lorde essays and readings from Langston Hughes with an acknowledgement of his sexual orientation. He described several materials he has used and the result:

> This year I picked El Bronx Remembered, by Nicolas Amor. In one of the stories called "Herman and Alice,"...it has an older gay Puerto Rican man who marries a young pregnant Puerto Rican girl more or less to protect her. This caused a great discussion:..."Well, maybe he wanted to try it, maybe he was bisexual."...There's a school newspaper being done by the...Board of Education....It's student-written....They've had articles on gay and lesbian bias and issues. I use one of those articles to set up something I've developed called the Gay Game. It presents a wide...view of students, from the student who says "They should burn in hell," to the student who says "Well, I'm gay, and I'm you're best friend."...Kids...each get a slip of paper and have to role play it.
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> I had one [Mexican] kid whose name was Zunica....On the front page of every newspaper...was staff sergeant Zunica getting discharged after he'd been made Soldier of the Year. So I of course bring in the article...and all the kids [say] "Yes, yes, yes, Soldier of the Year, how great for a Hispanic." But then I tell them he got thrown out because he was gay, and it bridges that gap between them to the point where they [say] "that's not fair."...It really strikes at a level that they can see that the oppression comes on many different levels.[32]

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[31] Respondent #2, interview.

[32] Respondent #4, interview.

By having students act out roles, and using material that relates to their cultures, he captures their interest in the topic.

He was amazed at the level of discussion that he could conduct with his students:

> When my kids saw [the television special] "Doing Time on Maple Drive" [they asked] "How come all the time they're just showing white kids who are gay?" Bang! Who would have expected a fifteen, sixteen, seventeen-year-old kid from the Dominican Republic to react with that kind of a perception? Most teachers wouldn't know how to handle that kind of a perception. But my kids were prepared to take the risk to say "Hey,...I know a Dominican person who's gay."
>
> ...There are no words to describe that kind of sexuality in their own language, or if there are the words are so derogatory....It helps to have them analyze it in terms of language, because that can be neutral ground. They know their language, I know mine and we can examine the differences and really see how the cultures see [homophobia] and/or have maintained it, and maybe what institution within the culture has maintained it that way....Students have definitely exceeded my wildest dreams and expectations in terms of what they're prepared to deal with and how well they deal with it....I have almost never gotten a bad reaction in class or outside of class.[33]

This teacher has been able to conduct sophisticated metalinguistic and political discussions with his high school students. By relating the content to his students' lives, he has taken the discussion of queer issues from the typical name-calling and giggling to a new realm of analysis and understanding.

Teachers who introduce queer content have done so in many innovative ways, and met with a variety of results. Some students have been embarrassed,

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[33] Ibid.

others very interested, and some willing to participate in sophisticated discussions. With methods ranging from a few reactive comments to entire units on queer issues, these teachers are forging new ground, filling the void left by heterosexist texts and curricula. One teacher said he had even convinced the Advanced Placement Spanish classes in his school to use gay authors.[34] Apart from the reactions to coming out discussed in chapter three, no tragic results were reported when these teachers used queer content in their classes. Some encountered resistance from administrators and parents, but not enough to stop them from continuing with their lesson plans. However, I imagine that many public school ESL teachers who used queer texts would come under fire, amidst a resurgence of pro-censorship, homophobic campaigns currently being waged at the school board level. (I will discuss heterosexual teachers using queer content in the next section.)

I must say that as a bisexual, I was disappointed to see the rarity of bisexual issues being addressed, both in name and more substantially. I hope that gay and lesbian teachers will educate themselves about these issues, and realize that some of their students are bisexual as well. Further, few of us have begun to deal with transgendered issues in the classroom, and we must recognize that our transgendered students are even more lacking for role models and information than our gay, lesbian and bisexual students. My thoughts turn to two students I have had, both men who seemed to identify with the women and were very

[34] Respondent #4, survey, p. 5.

androgynous. While I do not know what gender identity these two students had, I must wonder what I had to offer them in terms of support and inclusion, beyond not laughing at them as the students did. This is a can of worms that also must be opened and confronted.

Making Changes in TESOL, Making Connections to the Outside World

Several queer ESOL teachers have applied their experiences dealing with these issues in the classroom to changing the field of TESOL, and making an impact in the "outside world" as well. These changes have occurred on both theoretical and practical levels. Some queer teacher-educators are training teachers about how to incorporate queer issues into their classrooms. Others are questioning the conclusions of linguistic research based solely on heterosexuals. A few are making a difference in the lives of queer youth outside of their schools. All are using their sexual identities as a basis for instituting fundamental changes that must be made.

For example, Chuck Jones has conducted several workshops for ESL teachers about dealing with queer issues in their classes. At the recent TESOL conference, he and Darcy Jack presented a workshop entitled "Inclusion: Gay and Lesbian Issues and Literature in ESL Classes." Participants were asked to role-play an argument in a staff meeting about whether or not they would include these issues in the curriculum. The presenters talked about different levels of action that can be taken, depending upon how much risk a

teacher wants to take. Then Jack presented a sample lesson plan that she has used in an advanced ESL secondary class. Participants were left with a list of resources and practical advice for instituting their own lesson plans.[35]

While most of the participants in this workshop seemed to be queer (based on my observations), Jones has also conducted numerous workshops such as this for mostly heterosexual ESL teachers. He said that the teachers typically express four different kinds of concerns. The first concern is political: what administrators, parents and students will say. Some teachers were afraid of coming under attack from conservative members of the community. The second is "personal/experiential: How capable/sensitive am I to do this?" The third is "pedagogical/ methodological: Where do I find the materials/training?" Several were concerned about using "sex books" with children. Not having read books like Heather Has Two Mommies, they did not realize that these books are about families, and have no sexual content at all. Finally, the fourth is "philosophical: Why should I do this?" It was difficult for many heterosexual teachers to see why queer issues were even relevant for their students. Jones is helping both queer and heterosexual ESOL teachers to envision and implement curricula that include queer issues.[36]

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[35] Chuck Jones and Darcy Jack, "Inclusion: Gay and Lesbian Issues and Literature in ESL Classes," Workshop presented at the annual TESOL conference, Baltimore, Maryland, March 10, 1994.

[36] Chuck Jones, "Teachers' Concerns: Including Gay/Lesbian Literature in Their Classes," unpublished data, 1993.

On the linguistic research front, some professionals are overturning the findings of heterosexist research. For example, Martha Clark-Cummings has been conducting research about communication among lesbian couples that contradicts the findings of Deborah Tannen. In her pop book, You Just Don't Understand, Tannen refers to research that claims that men and women have learned gender-specific communication styles which they use in relationships. However, she only takes into account the communication styles of heterosexual couples, while Clark-Cummings has been looking at the speech patterns of female-female couples. Since there is no man to take the "male role," the research Tannen cites seems inadequate to explain how queer couples communicate.[37] One respondent also mentioned Tannen's book, and said that he challenged linguists to explain the speech of drag queens and transsexuals. After reading Tannen's book and others like it, he said, "all of them have...convinced me...that learning how to use language is essentially a power issue, not a [gender] issue."[38] By challenging heterosexism and notions of gender, these TESOL professionals are redefining the terms of debate, expanding the fundamental questions that researchers ask.

Outside of the profession, some teachers are making differences in the lives of young queers. Two respondents mentioned working with queer youth through local organizations. One said that, just as he was a role model for his

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[37] Martha Clark-Cummings, "Gay and Lesbian Concerns for ESL in Higher Education," TESOL Colloquium.

[38] Respondent #4, interview.

queer students, he was also one for the young people he works with outside of school. He said that he did the work because:

> I don't see anybody doing it for the kids, and nobody did it for me when I was a kid. And it made my life hell....I've held too many kids beaten up in my arms, not to feel or not to take it personally.[39]

Having been in the same position as many of the kids he works with, and having managed to survive, he is a powerful role model for them. Another respondent spoke about how thrilling it was for him to be able to help queer youth:

> If there's a dream and a passion I have, it is that queer youth will be affirmed and learn in high school, or younger, that they have choices, and among those choices are relationships and good work, and a normal life, and all the other stuff of the American Dream. That's their dream too--they have all those things open and available to them. Because I just did a panel, I opened the workshop with a panel of some Asian and Latino and Anglo youth..., and one of them was fourteen years old. One girl was sixteen now but she came out when she was thirteen. I'm thinking, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"...They can be dating, or at least contemplating dating, the gender they want at the age when they're supposed to be doing it. And that is just, it warms my heart. I want to cry when I see them and think, "Oh, thank God. A generation that'll be less scarred."[40]

These teachers are proud to be helping to create a new era, where queer youth grow up feeling whole from the beginning, instead of discovering themselves after years of denial and anguish.

On professional, theoretical and practical levels, these teachers are revolutionizing the field of TESOL, and reaching out to students and other young people to make real differences in their lives. It is through the support of leaders

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Respondent #10, interview.

like this that queers in TESOL are beginning to "clear out a space in society for you an' me."[41]

The experience of being queer equips ESOL teachers with certain assets, as do many other components of our personalities and experiences. Most respondents felt that they had a keen sensitivity toward marginalized groups, and that they could use this sensitivity to better relate to their students. Some felt that their experiences with oppression have given them strength and skills that they can pass on to their students. Those who face multiple oppressions have used their experience in similar ways. Teachers who are out are role models to their queer students. Whether or not they are out, by dealing with queer issues in the classroom, teachers have given students the freedom to speak about silenced issues; expanded their students' critical thinking skills; and provided cultural information lacking in most classrooms. Feeling that queer culture is indeed valuable is a boost for queer teachers who have been made to feel ashamed of who we are. Finally, some teachers are taking their work out of the classroom, making revolutionary changes in teacher training, in theory, and in the real lives of young queers. Queer ESOL teachers have many gifts to bring to the multi-cultural world of TESOL.

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[41] Diane DiMassa, Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist, Cartoon (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1993), 29.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

I began this project with the question, what is the cost of having to separate one's personal life from one's professional life? Realizing that queer teachers often find ways of integrating their personal lives and their work, I began to ask more questions: what is the overall climate of their work places like: supportive, indifferent or hostile? Why do some teachers come out, and how do they do it? Why don't other teachers come out? Finally, I asked: how does being queer contribute to one's teaching ability, and what do queer teachers contribute to the profession of TESOL? The answers I have found suggest what it is like to be a queer ESOL teacher, and why both queer teachers and students should not just be tolerated, but supported, validated and appreciated.

Summary of Results

Queer ESOL teachers have a certain culture, history and experience with oppression that we do not leave behind when we go to work. For my respondents, the overall climate at work has a profound effect on how comfortable they are in being themselves and speaking about themselves, and whether they can integrate their personal lives with their professional lives, or whether they must conceal a part of themselves. In addition to the climate of a work place, individuals have different ideas about how relevant their sexual

orientation is to their teaching; whether or not they talk about their orientation with others; and how it contributes to their pedagogical methods and content.

Most respondents encountered a ubiquitous assumption of heterosexuality at their schools, among both staff and students. Heterosexuals take for granted their freedom to speak about their everyday lives. However, the assumption of heterosexuality requires queer teachers to constantly make decisions about coming out: Should they do it or not? To whom? How? These decisions were easy for a few respondents (after a lot of practice), difficult for most, and agonizing for a few. All of the respondents came out to at least some colleagues, and met with various results. Most teachers chose to come out to colleagues by casually mentioning same-sex lovers or queer-related events, although some came out more formally and forcefully. Some were given a great deal of support by queer and/or straight colleagues, some were given grudging acceptance because of the sheer numbers of queer teachers, many were met with indifference, and a few with outright hostility. Indifference can be as much of a slap in the face as overt homophobia, because it implies that one is not <u>valued</u>, but merely <u>tolerated</u>.

The degree of homophobia in an environment is determined not only by the attitudes of colleagues, but also by the attitudes of administrators. For respondents, some administrators were very supportive, and sought to confront homophobia. Others were silent on the subject, while a few were vocally homophobic and tried to silence or fire queer teachers. Sometimes this homophobia was very subtle: for example, it is easy for an administrator not to

renew the contract of an "undesirable" part-time employee by claiming low enrollment.

In turn, the attitudes of administrators translate into policies covering rights and benefits for queer teachers. Only six respondents were certain that they had legal protection against job discrimination based on their sexual orientation. This protection came from both their institutions and their local governments. Most queer ESOL teachers, however, have no such guarantees. Our basic rights are not recognized. This lack of legal protection exists within the context of increasing attacks on the few rights queers have won in this country--attacks which include campaigns against the media, teachers and public officials mentioning homosexuality in a positive light.

In addition to basic legal protection, most respondents were not granted the same benefits for their same-sex partners that married couples were. By being denied health insurance, tuition reduction and family housing for their partners, queer teachers are not receiving the same financial compensation as their heterosexual counterparts. Beyond the economic inequity, a lack of domestic partner benefits suggests to queer people that our same-sex relationships are not recognized as being equivalent to heterosexual relationships. Only one respondent's institution actively included queers in their affirmative action policy. For EFL teachers, the lack of partner benefits and difficulties in getting visas limit the locations where they can teach and remain with their partners.

The overall climate, attitudes and official policies of institutions affect the career choices of some queer ESOL teachers. Some have chosen to teach despite the homophobia in the field. Others are actively seeking areas of the country and institutions where they will be accepted, and where they will have guarantees of the same rights and benefits as heterosexuals. Thus institutions that do nothing to validate their queer teachers may fail to attract or retain talented teachers who happen to be queer.

Finally, many queer teachers also face additional forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and classism. These multiple forms of oppression interact in complex ways, and often reinforce one another. They may add to the isolation that queer teachers feel, or eclipse homophobia as more urgent issues. While overt instances of other forms of oppression are often challenged within the field of TESOL (with its emphasis on valuing different cultures), in most cases homophobia remains unchallenged, in its subtle and overt forms.

All of these work issues outside of the classroom affect the decisions that teachers make about coming out to their students. This was the most difficult issue for my respondents. They carefully weighed the benefits of coming out against possible negative consequences. My respondents chose to come out to all of their students, only to certain classes, only to certain individuals, or not to come out to any students.

Respondents cited several reasons for not coming out to students. Some simply felt it was inappropriate, because it was irrelevant, too personal, or it

would stifle homophobic students. Others wanted to come out but were unsure of how and when to do it. Many were concerned about negative reactions from students. Foremost, they were afraid of being misunderstood and losing their students' respect. Some felt that the cultural gaps between themselves and their students were too wide for the students to accept their sexual orientation. Those who teach children may also be accused of molesting or "recruiting" their students. Many expressed concerns about the lack of legal and administrative protection, should students response negatively. Finally, the threat of violence from students may make a teacher reluctant to come out.

Teachers who do not come out are forced to keep a strict separation between their work and their personal lives. This omission and fragmentation can take a severe psychological toll, or it can seem normal to teachers, depending on how they view the role of their sexual orientation.

These concerns were dramatized in the traumatic experience that one respondent reported: she came out unexpectedly, and was met with students' awkwardness, disrespect and failure to acknowledge the risk she had taken. That other respondents did not report such negative experiences suggests either that teachers who come out usually get positive results, or that teachers who sense they will get negative reactions choose not to come out.

On the other hand, the rest of the respondents who came out to students reported pretty positive reactions. They cited several reasons for coming out, which included feeling more whole; connecting better with their students;

educating their students about homophobia and queer culture; serving as a role model and source of support for queer students; and sometimes saving isolated queer students' lives. Teachers benefitted by being able to be more "real" in the classroom, and students benefitted by being allowed to talk openly with a queer person about an issues they were interested in.

Respondents reported a variety of methods for coming out, depending on whom they came out to (all classes, some classes, or some individuals) and their particular teaching situations. Some carefully planned how they would come out and prepared students beforehand, and others came out much more casually and/or spontaneously. Most of these teachers had several factors in common: they had a good rapport with their students, who were pretty receptive; they came out within a meaningful context; they tried to reduce the threatening impact of their revelation in some way; they allowed their students to respond; and they were willing to risk the consequences of coming out. Hopefully other teachers who want to come out to students can learn from these teachers' experiences.

Finally, some respondents came out to individual students (who were usually also queer) if the students expressed interest. Teachers who talked to queer students gave them much-needed support and information that many heterosexual teachers would not be able to provide. They used their personal and cultural knowledge to help queer students overcome their isolation and develop healthy sexual identities. While most respondents said they supported queer

students by coming out to them, one was able to encourage and support a lesbian student without coming out.

Whether or not they come out, queers in TESOL make many contributions to their students, their institutions, the field and the world. Most respondents felt that their sexual orientation was relevant to their teaching, and that it enhanced their ability to understand their students. Because they know what it is like to be ostracized within their own culture, to be silenced and to switch between cultures, they have empathy for ESL students who are outsiders in this culture (although they cannot understand exactly how students feel). Those who have faced multiple oppressions feel that the sum of their experiences makes them stronger as teachers and more understanding of their students. Respondents use their experiences to teach their students survival skills; to make their classes safer and more relevant for all students; to be an example of success for their students; and to encourage students to respect differences. In addition, not being out handicaps teachers in their ability to directly apply their own experiences to a classroom discussion.

In addition to their understanding of students, most respondents have used their sexual identities as a basis for introducing innovative and inclusive content and methodology in the classroom. Heterosexuals often think that being queer is simply sexual behavior, and many don't recognize the existence of queer culture(s) (the history, values, art, music, literature, theory, holidays, etc. that queers share and are a part of); often if queer culture is recognized it is denigrated or reduced

to "hair dressers and disco." Therefore, queers have the perspective to question the way in which culture is taught, and to implement a multi-cultural approach that includes queer cultures as well as others. The EFL teachers in my study had the hardest time introducing queer culture and homophobia as topics of discussion, because their teaching environments enforced silence on these issues. Most of the ESL professionals, however, have approached the topic in one way or another.

Some teachers are reactive: they counter the homophobic statements of students with positive information, and respond to students' questions about the topic. Others are more proactive: they plan to cover queer issues as part of a larger context or as a unit unto itself. Several teachers use guest speakers, and prepare students by having them read about the topic, watch videos, and generate questions. Having guest speakers takes the pressure off of teachers: they do not need to come out or be the "experts." Others begin a discussion of queer issues that evolves naturally from topics like "family" or "sex." Some put the topic into the context of discrimination, co-cultures or AIDS. One teacher reported taking part in another teacher's entire unit on queer issues. Another teacher said that by relating the topic to his young students' lives, he piqued their interest and helped them to develop their critical thinking skills.

Because these is a dearth of TESOL texts and materials that even mention queers, teachers have used other sources. Some show popular videos with queer themes. Others use readings from the media, and children's, young adult and

adult books that are relevant. Some teachers use the students' own questions or homophobic remarks as a starting point for a discussion. Other creative uses of materials include t-shirts, buttons and a newsletter written by queer youth. Hopefully publishers will be offering more inclusive ESOL texts in the future.[1]

Teachers who bring up these issues encounter a variety of responses. Many students are very interested and excited that they are allowed to speak about the topic. Some are unsure but curious. Some are very uncomfortable with the topic. In general though, these teachers reported that students learn a lot about the issues, and sometimes rethink their homophobic attitudes. One high school teacher raved about the sophisticated thinking his students showed in their discussions on the topic, which far surpassed his expectations of their abilities.

While these teachers' efforts to include gay and lesbian issues are admirable, unfortunately most of them seemed to omit mention of bisexuals and transgendered people. This was disconcerting to me as a bisexual, and I hope that gay and lesbian teachers will educate themselves about these issues and include them in their queer content.

Beyond the classroom, some queer ESOL teachers are making an impact in teacher training, linguistic research and working with queer youth. One teacher trainer has presented numerous workshops about the practicalities of implementing a queer-inclusive curriculum, for both queer and heterosexual teachers. One researcher is challenging the heterosexist assumptions of linguistic

[1] For a list of relevant texts and resources, see appendix four.

research. Finally, a few respondents are making a significant impact on the lives of queer youth by volunteering with them through local organizations. These role models have helped young queers to survive and achieve an equal footing with heterosexuals their age. As I mentioned in the first chapter, numerous queer TESOL professionals have begun building a network of support and information-sharing that has filled the void of silence, reached out to isolated teachers, and made research like mine possible.

What Do Queer ESOL Teachers Want?

Given that queer ESOL teachers make so many contributions and struggle with so many issues that heterosexuals do not, what changes would support them and allow them to operate as freely as heterosexuals? The last question I asked respondents was "What do you need to be comfortable and effective as a queer teacher?" One teacher did not think that his needs were any different from heterosexual teachers, and did not answer the question. Another teacher had not had enough teaching experience to know what she wanted, but she had some guesses about her future needs. The remaining respondents had specific ideas, based on their particular situations. Their answers covered different areas of change needed, from personal acceptance to legal protection to recognition of their lives and their culture as a viable part of what we should be teaching our students. As one teacher summed it up, he needs:

1) A basic safety net--can't be fired or discriminated against.
2) Autonomy to design/implement gay/lesbian issues into my work.

> 3) Acceptance by colleagues and recognition of my competence independent of my orientation.[2]

These responses should serve as a basis for change in the profession.

Safety was a big issue for one lesbian teacher:

> I need to feel like I'm safe, and that students and administrators and colleagues are not going to be allowed to make comments or say nasty things to me, or hurt me. I need to feel...that if a student would say something homophobic, or if a teacher would, that I could get support....That [it] would be unacceptable....The only other thing I'd change is if my students would come in and say "Oh, you're gay? That's great!" It's very hard: every semester I have to start from ground zero....That's just something that only I can do.

Another teacher cautioned that we "must respect where students are 'coming from' and their limits of acceptance.'" There is an inherent tension between a teacher's need for basic respect and students' rights to their own beliefs and values.[3]

However, many teachers simply asked to able to deal with this tension unhindered. A bisexual woman said:

> You're so alone in the classroom, really, in some ways, that it's almost like whatever your colleagues believe doesn't really matter....Provided I'm given the freedom to make up my own lessons, and deal with issues as I choose, I can't see that I need anything to make me feel comfortable.

Another teacher said that what he needs is for "people who don't agree to get out of my way!" He added that it is up to queer teachers to defend our rights and give students the chance to talk about queer issues:

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[2] Respondent #10, survey, p. 6.

[3] Respondent #1A, interview. Respondent #7, survey, p. 6.

> We have the greatest opportunity as educators because we really can have an effect....Because students get excited about these kinds of things because they're so personally invested in them....And if we as educators ignore it, or react against it, then we put up so many walls...that not only just cut off conversation but terrorize people ....That is something that I find reprehensible....It comes with the territory....If you were born gay or lesbian, not only do you have to accept it and deal with it: you better get out there and protect it, because nobody else is going to do it for you.

These teachers simply want the freedom to counteract the misinformation and myths that they encounter, without being censored by their institutions.[4]

Another gay teacher wants a freedom that includes increased visibility for queers:

> I would feel much more comfortable in my position if we were freer to be more open, if I felt free to come out to all of my classes, if we had a domestic partners policy....There's still a long ways to go.... There are just little things like putting up a gay poster or something on the bulletin board in the office and having one of the secretaries take it down....If we could just be allowed to be more visible....I guess I feel...gays have to talk about this stuff more....It's hard for [straight people] to understand that it is a big thing, because that's all stuff that they take for granted....At the same time I think I want their acceptance and tolerance....For the most part I think we have a pretty good group in our university, and I'm pretty happy there, in terms of the way things are in the office. And in the classroom, that's something that I have to do myself, I think. My boss doesn't say I can't come out to people.[5]

He thinks the responsibility for dealing with homophobia should be shared by queers and heterosexuals.

One lesbian teacher is tired of bearing the burden of bringing up these issues in class, and would like heterosexual teachers to actively address them:

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[4] Respondent #6, interview. Respondent #4, survey, p. 6. Respondent #4, interview.

[5] Respondent #11, interview.

> I wish straight teachers...the full-time tenured sorts, were dealing with the issue of homosexuality in the classroom....Why should queer teachers have to be out there putting themselves on the line all the time and feel alone and unsupported? We need more support from the straight community, more validation, the education coming from them not always us. They have less to lose by bringing it up and it shows their support; gives an example to the students of a positive way of dealing with it.[6]

Heterosexuals are in a good position to challenge homophobia without risking as much as queer teachers do.

In addition to support from heterosexuals, many respondents cited the need for a network or community of queer TESOL professionals. A gay man said:

> I hope that, in the future, there will be more organizations for gay and lesbian teachers, bisexual teachers, so that we can sit down and discuss these issues. I know that there are some, but they're very few and far between.

Another gay teacher said he needed a gay community, either at work or outside of it:

> I'd like to have [a gay community] at work, but if I can't then I have to feel like I'm on my own. Which is fine, because when I come back to [where I live] I have that community, which is outside of work.

A bisexual teacher wants both formal and informal networks:

> Within schools there needs to be either an underground or an above ground, or both, network, I think....People should support each other...because it's hard to be isolated....Especially if you're out, well either way, really, but if you're out and are catching a lot of flack from the administration....

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[6] Respondent #12, interview.

Different types of networks, from informal chats with colleagues to an electronic mail (e-mail) network to a formal TESOL body, are necessary to build a community of queer ESOL professionals.[7]

A young gay teacher who is just beginning to come out wants leadership from other queer teachers, even as he is taking a leadership position himself:

> I have what I need. Except the courage....The environment that I'm in now is ideal. It would be nice if there was someone...to follow.... But...I see myself as taking that role because I'm a little bit stronger than this...friend I'm out to, [who's] following me....The more status I gain, the more comfortable I become....I'm going to be stronger as a gay teacher. It's going to take a long time, but I'm very comforted [by] that fact. I'm very accepting of myself....To see more [role models] would help me,...[people who are really out] and are proud of it.[8]

Each step in coming out more publicly requires courage, and therefore a person who is more out can give a hand to someone a few "rungs" below on the coming-out "ladder."

Apart from support from queer and heterosexual colleagues and basic guarantees of rights, it takes an inner strength for queers in TESOL to carry on with their daily lives. One respondent said he needs "nothing more than I have. Self-respect." Another stated that she is "already effective [as] a queer teacher," and that she merely needs "acceptance." Increased visibility and networking can serve to nurture this type of strength within queer teachers.[9]

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[7] Respondent #5, interview. Respondent #8, interview. Respondent # 9, interview.

[8] Respondent #3, interview.

[9] Respondent #15, survey, p. 6. Respondent #14, survey, p. 6.

Finally, some respondents stressed that we need to reevaluate the way that we think about teaching altogether. We need to be conscious of the implications of how and what we are teaching our students:

> [Ideally, I'd work for a] program that was very conscious of the messages they were sending students, in terms of the choice of materials and...the curriculum. [It would] support a diverse agenda of...issues we were going to be presenting....It would also include an awareness that students have a lot of needs up front about learning about ...the United States. For example, I'm really upset that our program has a terrible orientation...that doesn't include anything on safer sex....I've found that students are really scared and ignorant about...AIDS. So it would be a program that would not be afraid to address [these things]. It would...[treat] students like...they're... adults, and like they have a brain. It would be open to teacher input, and trust that we may not all agree on a lot of different issues, but have a safe enough atmosphere so that we could talk about things.
>
> [Given that atmosphere] it would just be a natural, ok thing [to talk about sexual orientation]....In the best world, people would not assume everybody was straight....Lastly, [it would have] an awareness of what we do in relation to what's going on in the world. Why are we teaching English, why this particular kind of English, what implications does that have?[10]

Given an environment that really encourages critical thinking, respect for differences, and the freedom to share one's beliefs and feelings, queer teachers, students and others could flourish.

Recommendations

Based on my research, I have several recommendations for what individuals, institutions and the profession as a whole can do to support, validate

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[10] Respondent #2, interview.

and truly include queers. Change needs to occur on many levels, so there are many different roles that people can take to be a part of this change. It is important to realize that challenging homophobia is an ongoing process, not simply a matter of "turning it off."

In their workshop on gay/lesbian inclusion, Chuck Jones and Darcy Jack discussed different levels of action that individuals can take. The first level includes actions such as learning more about queer issues; establishing a safe haven for students by not allowing name-calling or stereotyping; and providing students with information about queer resources. The second level includes speaking out against homophobia publicly; encouraging an institution to include queer issues throughout its programs; and working to revise curricula to include queer perspectives. The third level involves encouraging students to back up their support for queers with action, doing political work to overturn oppression, and taking an active role in queer cultural events. The presenters also referred to the Riddle Scale of Homophobia that ranges from "repulsion" to "acceptance" to "nurturance." Each person can make a contribution somewhere along the range of possible action, with the goal of working toward more acceptance and appreciation of queers.[11]

Individual queer ESOL teachers can assess what rights, benefits and allies they have where they work, and how risky it would be to come out to their colleagues and/or bring up queer issues in the classroom. Finding out about

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[11] Chuck Jones and Darcy Jack, "Inclusion: Gay and Lesbian Issues and Literature in ESL Classes," Handouts, p. 2-3.

worst-case scenarios, non-discrimination policies and local laws, and who would be supportive among the staff helps to give an accurate picture of these risks. Many people become less homophobic simply because they know someone who is openly queer. Teachers who already include queer issues in their curricula should share their experiences with colleagues on a local, regional and national level. Teachers who want to bring up queer issues can use different approaches, from reacting to students' comments, to including queers within a larger context, to devoting entire units or courses to the subject. The content should depict the true diversity of the queer community, which includes people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, classes and abilities, and people who are bisexual and transgendered as well as lesbian and gay.

There is a great need for ESOL texts that include queer content on an equivalent basis with portrayal of heterosexual issues. The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force of TESOL intends to lobby publishers to offer more inclusive texts. However, publishers need to hear from individual teachers as well, in large numbers. We need to vote with our (or our institutions') checkbooks: we should actively seek texts with queer content and tell publishers that we expect inclusion. What's more, queer and queer-friendly writers need to write these texts if we want them to be really relevant. It would also help to have a national database of queer-positive materials, lesson plans and resources that would be appropriate for ESOL classes. Of course, teachers whose curricula are strictly determined may

find themselves fighting a battle against censorship before they can think about including queer content.

If teachers have not come out to their students but want to, they can prepare by learning how other teachers in similar situations have come out successfully. They can define what their goals are (e.g., acceptance by students, simply conveying information about themselves, supporting queer students) and decide how best to achieve these goals. It is important to remember that while coming out can bring wonderful results, we must also be prepared for the worst. Coming out within a meaningful context and doing so in a culturally sensitive way that allows students to respond honestly can make the experience more comfortable and rewarding for both the teacher and students. It would be helpful if there were local or national programs that paired "more out" queer teachers with "less out" teachers in a mentoring or buddy relationship, so that they could share advice and support.

Individuals can also find support by getting involved in existing organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force of TESOL, and local groups for queer teachers in general. They can also found local groups that meet their needs. These groups could range from city-wide organizations for queers in TESOL to an informal network of the queer teachers at a particular institution. Those who are comfortable being out must take the lead in initiating such efforts, recognizing that there are many closeted teachers and other TESOL professionals who are isolated and need support.

In addition to supporting each other, queers in TESOL should share information with each other and with heterosexual allies. More research should be done on queer topics, and presentations should be made at the regional and international TESOL conferences. Topics could include queer issues in EFL; the needs of queer ESOL teachers of color; struggles of public school teachers; inclusion of bisexual and transgender issues; sharing of lesson plans and coming-out experiences; the experiences of non-teacher TESOL professionals; and strategies for supporting queer students. In addition, articles on these topics by both queers and heterosexuals should be submitted to TESOL publications. There are currently no articles on the ERIC system cross-referenced under "homosexuality" and "English (second language)," so writers should submit their publications to ERIC with these descriptors.[12] Finally, an electronic mail list is in the process of being set up, which should facilitate more effective communication among queer TESOL professionals. We need to share our experiences with each other and with the rest of the profession.

Just as it is not only up to people of color to resolve racism, queer teachers should not have sole responsibility for combatting homophobia. Heterosexual colleagues, administrators and others need to lend vocal support to queer teachers and students in TESOL, integrate our issues into curricula and begin to make real changes in the way we do business. By speaking about the realities of queer people, queer culture, and homophobia, heterosexuals can create a freer and safer

[12] A search for "gay" revealed only authors with the name Gay.

environment for queers. It is a simple matter of justice that our issues be included in multi-cultural approaches, and students have a right to learn about a variety of cultures, not just the Beaver Cleaver version. Heterosexual teachers should also not assume that their students are heterosexual or homophobic: some students are queer, some have queer family members or friends, and some are simply interested in the subject. Therefore course content should reflect a variety of sexual orientations and families. By "coming out" as being supportive of queers, heterosexuals set a standard of equality and allow their queer colleagues to feel validated and valued as a part of their institutions. Homophobic students who hear about queer issues from more than just "the queer teacher" may be more likely to rethink their attitudes. In order to do all of these things, heterosexuals need the proper information, support and motivation, so training and networking on these issues should be done.

Institutions or schools also can make changes to support their queer students and teachers. To support students, a Project 10 model can be followed, where each school both identifies openly queer teachers as sources of support and has some sort of support group for queer and questioning students.[13] Queer issues can be integrated into the entire curriculum as part of a multi-cultural approach, instead of only being covered by a few (mostly queer) teachers. Furthermore, administrators can set a tone of respect for differences, including the variety of sexual orientations. They can also establish staff trainings that

[13] See appendix four for a list of organizations such as Project 10.

educate teachers about queer issues and how to handle them in the classroom. Queer teachers who want to publish or present on queer topics should be encouraged the same way that those who explore other topics are encouraged. At the minimum, institutions should have policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity[14], and that give equal benefits for same-sex relationships. Very progressive institutions may even include queers in their affirmative action statements, recognizing the value of our perspectives and knowledge, and seeking to counteract job discrimination. Since many TESOL institutions are part of larger universities, etc., this may mean lobbying for changes at a level above the TESOL program. Finally, institutions can also lend support for laws that protect the civil rights and domestic-partner benefits of queers.

Not only schools that teach ESOL, but also schools that train ESOL teachers, should follow these guidelines. As a master's student, some of my major concerns were how homophobic the field is; where I could find more accepting teaching situations; and how queer teachers balance their personal and professional lives. I had no out faculty members to talk to, and at first I had no idea how to find other queer ESOL teachers. Only because I was very vocal and my classmates funneled to me all the "queer information" they came across did I find out about the TESOL Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force. Schools that train ESOL teachers should have openly queer faculty members who can act as

[14] Gender identity refers to the gender that one feels one is, regardless of physical characteristics. Including "gender identity" would grant rights to transsexual people, who are not protected against discrimination by typical "gender" clauses, unless they have had their gender legally changed.

role models and sources of support and information. The issue of sexual orientation and homophobia should be integrated into the TESOL curriculum. For example, students should be asked to examine how their sexual orientation and other cultural identities figure into their teaching. Students should also be encouraged to do independent research in the area, as I was. Teacher trainers also need to examine whether or not they are serving the needs of their queer students.

On a larger level, TESOL as an international organization can make a powerful statement in support of queer rights that will be heard around the world. It should push for full integration of queer issues into every area of TESOL. This includes implementing non-discrimination clauses; encouraging queer-related presentations at conferences, soliciting articles on queer topics for its publications, and developing a base of resources for teaching queer issues. It should also fully support the establishment of a permanent body that oversees the concerns of queer members (the Task Force is temporary). TESOL should network with and follow the lead of other education organizations that have taken stands against homophobia, such as the Modern Language Association and the National Education Association (NEA). The NEA has published both a policy validating people of all sexual orientations and guidelines entitled "Teaching and Counseling Gay and Lesbian Students" (see appendix four for excerpts from these

publications). TESOL has much work to do and a lot of potential to influence policies in support of queers.[15]

Having slogged through this entire work, the reader may be wondering how I manage being a queer teacher of ESL. Luckily my supervisors are supportive, and my school has a policy that protects me against job discrimination. I am out to all of my colleagues (unless they haven't been paying attention). They are generally accepting or they don't say anything negative to me. A few of them (queer and straight) bring up queer issues in the classroom. So far in my classes, I have included a bit of queer content when it seemed to fit in, although it's hard to include it in pronunciation class, which is what I have been teaching lately. But it is my goal to eventually fully integrate queer issues into my course content. I also have not yet come out to any students (although I'm sure some of them suspect). I plan to: it's just a matter of when, to whom, and how. This project has given me more than enough inspiration and information. I just need the courage now.

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[15] Some of these ideas come from Gay/Lesbian Task Force Interim Status Report to TESOL Executive Board, Photocopy (Apr. 14, 1993) and Status Report: Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Task Force, submitted by Martha Clark Cummings, Chair, Photocopy (Oct. 1994).

APPENDIX ONE

Survey of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which is a Masters in TESOL Thesis project. I am a bisexual woman who is interested in how teachers in this field deal with homophobia/biphobia on the job, and if they feel that being a sexual minority contributes to their abilities as educators. For purposes of brevity, I will use the term "queer" to refer to lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender people. I realize that some people find this term offensive, but I hope you will bear with me and realize that I use it with the utmost affection and respect.

Feel free not to answer any questions that seem too personal. Please send me the survey within two weeks of receiving it, and **by November 12, 1993 at the latest**. If you are willing to be interviewed by telephone in addition to this survey, please check the appropriate box and I will get in touch with you. If you would like to be interviewed by phone instead of completing this survey, let me know. I also welcome any feedback you want to give on the survey itself.

Send surveys/feedback to:

Karen Snelbecker
[Address]

[Phone]

If you know other teachers who would like to participate in this survey, feel free to make them copies of the survey, or let me know and I will send them copies.

The data from this project will be reported anonymously. Respondents who are quoted individually will be referred to only in general terms (e.g. "a lesbian who teaches at a university in the Midwest"). If you don't want something that you write to be quoted directly, please write "don't quote" next to your answer, or at the top of page 2 if you would rather I not quote anything. If you feel mentioning certain identifying characteristics will violate your anonymity, please indicate this on page 7 and I won't refer to them.

Thanks again!

Karen Snelbecker

Survey of Queer Teachers of ESOL [2]
(if you need more room, use the back or another page)

1. Demographics
   Age ___ Gender _____
   Race _____ Ethnic background _____

   Sexual orientation (circle all that apply):

   lesbian gay bisexual transsexual other:

2. Teaching experience:
   a. Number of years you've taught in this field? ___
   b. Are you currently teaching? Y/N
   c. Please answer the following about your current or most recent teaching position:
      Circle one: current position past position
      Which state is it in? _____
      Circle one: big city small city suburbs town rural
      Type of institution: _____
      (e.g. university, refugee assistance program)
      Specific subject matter (e.g. pronunciation) if any:
      _____
      How long at this job? _____
      Circle one: part time full time

NOTE: PLEASE ANSWER THE REST OF THE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT TEACHING JOB AND/OR PAST TEACHING EXPERIENCE - WHICHEVER SEEMS MOST RELEVANT. IF YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT A PAST EXPERIENCE, PLEASE MAKE THAT CLEAR. OTHERWISE I WILL ASSUME YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT YOUR CURRENT POSITION.

3. Are you out to anyone at work? Y/N
   If yes:
   a. Who have you come out to? _____
   b. How did you do it?

   c. What were the reactions of the people you came out to?

   d. What, if any, were the reactions from other people?

e. How do you feel about coming out at work? [3]

4. Are you <u>not out</u> to some people at work (#3 and #4 may both be true)? Y/N

<u>If yes</u>:

a. Who are you not out to? _____

b. What do you do to prevent being "found out"?

c. How do you feel about not being out to some/all people at work?

5. Have you faced any of the following because of homophobia at work? (circle)

violence, discrimination, harassment, homophobic jokes/comments,

assumption of heterosexuality, ignorance of queer issues

a. If so, describe what happened:

b. How did you respond?

c. How did your school/institute respond?

6. Have you made career decisions based on your sexual orientation (e.g. choosing a school or field that would be less homophobic)? Y/N [4]
If yes, what decisions/changes have you made?

7. At work, have you had to deal with other forms of oppression besides homophobia (e.g. racism, sexism, discrimination against people with HIV)? Y/N
a. If yes, what has happened?

b. How has this affected your decisions about whether or not to come out, to teach about queer issues, etc.?

8. Are you a member of a same-sex couple? Y/N
If yes, what work-related problems have you faced that have to do with your same-sex relationship (e.g. not getting insurance, not being able to talk about your partner at work)?

9. In what ways, if any, do you bring your own sexual orientation into the classroom (e.g. discussion of outside life, personal history, political beliefs)?

If you come out to students, how do you do it (e.g. planned, only if they ask)?

10. Do you include queer issues/homophobia in general in your teaching? Y/N [5]
    a. If yes, how have you done this?

    b. Have you worked to include these issues in your school/institution curriculum? Y/N
    If yes, what have you tried to do and/or accomplished?

    c. How have students, other teachers, administrators, parents/community reacted to the inclusion of these issues (both a and b)?

11. a. Do you get support from any of the following people? Are they heterosexual or queer? (circle)

teachers	administrators	students	students' families
hetero/queer	hetero/queer	hetero/queer	hetero/queer

    If yes, in what ways do they support you?

    b. Are there policies, practices or groups that protect/affirm queers at your school/institute? Y/N

    If yes, what are they? (Attach written policies etc. if you want to, with or without your institute's name. Your responses will not be connected to the institute's name.)

12. Do you think that being queer contributes to your teaching ability? (e.g. being bicultural, awareness of oppression)? Y/N
    a. If yes, in what ways?

b. If no, do you think that your sexual orientation is irrelevant to your teaching? Y/N [6]
For what reasons?

c. Are you a member of a non-dominant group(s) (women, people of color, etc.) besides queers? Y/N Specify _____

If yes, do you think that this adds to your teaching ability? Y/N
In what ways?

13. Have you interacted with queer students? Y/N
If yes, in what ways have you interacted?

How have colleagues, parents etc. reacted if they are aware that you interact with queer students?

14. a. What, if any, organizations for queer teachers are you a member of?

b. What, if any, organizations for queers in general are you a member of?

c. What do you get out of belonging to these organizations?

15. What do you need to be comfortable and effective as a queer teacher?

16. Any other comments?

Technical Matters [7]

1. I will use some of the following general categories to refer to people if I quote them directly. If you feel that my using any particular categories to refer to you will violate your anonymity, please circle them below and I won't use them in referring to you individually.

age, race, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, how long at a job, region of country, city/rural etc., type of institution, specific subject matter you teach, part time/full time status

2. Would you like to contribute lesson plans/resources you have used that have to do with queer issues/homophobia? Y/N

If yes, please attach them.
Do you give me permission to publish them? Y/N
Do you give me permission to credit you by name? Y/N

Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

3. Would you be willing to be interviewed by telephone to talk about your experiences more in depth? (Your name will not be published in the study).

___ yes ___ no

Name: _____
Phone: Day _____ Eve: _____
Best time to call: _____ Time Zone: _____
Discretion necessary? ___ yes ___ no

THANK YOU VERY MUCH! HOPEFULLY THIS PROJECT WILL BE COMPLETED BY THE END OF THIS YEAR. I WILL TRY TO GET IT ACCEPTED BY THE ERIC SYSTEM. IF YOU WANT A COPY, PLEASE CONTACT ME IN DECEMBER (I'LL HAVE TO CHARGE FOR COPIES & POSTAGE).

Karen Snelbecker

APPENDIX TWO

SUMMARY OF DATA FROM SAMPLE

Total Respondents = 19

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender and Sexual Orientation
Male (10): Gay (10)
Female (9): Lesbian (4), Bisexual (3), Lesbian/Bisexual (2)
Transsexual (0)

Age
Oldest: 51, Youngest: 23, Median: 37, Mean: 37

Race/Ethnicity
Mixed European/African/Native American (1)
European (18)
German (4), Jewish (3), Jewish/Italian (1), English (1), Irish (1), Polish/German (1), Irish/German (1)
Unspecified (6) (Including 1 "WASP," 1 "trash," 1 "former Protestant, now Pagan")

GEOGRAPHICS

Area of US or Other Country
CA/WA (7), PA/NJ/NY (5), DC/MD/VA (3), New Eng. (1), TX (1), OH (1)
South America (1)

Type of area where employed
Big city (13), Town (5), Small city (1), Suburbs (0), Rural (0)

EMPLOYMENT

Currently teaching?
Yes (15), No (4)

Length of time working in TESOL
Longest: 31 yrs.
Shortest: <1 yr.
Median: 16 yrs.
Mean: 9.6 yrs.

Length of time at job (current or past)
Longest: 25 yrs.
Shortest: 3 weeks
Median: 12 yrs.
Mean: 4.2 years
No answer (3)

Type of School/Institution (includes some with multiple jobs)

United States:
University/4-Year College (9)
Community College (4)
Public School (3) (2 high school, 1 elementary)
Private Secondary Boarding School (2)
Community Center (1)
Technical Institute (1)

Outside U.S.:
Private Institution (2)

Type of Position
Full time (9), Part time (8), Both (2)

ESL (15), EFL (2), Teacher educator (2), Advisor (1), Director of federal program (1)

Subject matter, if specified, included "all skills" or "the four skills," culture and communication, grammar, poetry, writing, speaking and life skills.

DEGREE OF "OUTNESS" AT WORK

Out to colleagues
Some (10): Queer only (2), Straight only (2), Mixed (6)
All (9)

Out to administrators
Yes (10)
No (9)

Out to students
None (6)
Some individuals (4)
Some classes (6)
All classes (3)

APPENDIX THREE

EXAMPLES OF QUEER-SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

Non-discrimination policies

(The names of these universities are not given in order to maintain the anonymity of the respondents who submitted these policies.)

_____ welcomes diversity. It does not discriminate against either staff members or students because of race, religion, color, national origin, age, sexual preference, disability, or applicable veteran status.

_____ provides equal opportunity in education without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam era veteran in accordance with _____ policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

Diversity Appreciation Education

Tucson Unified School District, Board Policy 6112

Multicultural/non-sexist education is the identification and eradication of the dehumanizing biases of sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination. The TUSD Governing Board affirms its commitment to multicultural/non-sexist education to develop staff and student understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural and ethnic heritages and to foster knowledge, respect and appreciation of the contributions of women as well as men. The educational process conditions neither men nor women for stereotyped career roles. Learning produces an understanding of diverse values, history and achievement of identifiable groups in society. No achievement or contribution is overlooked because of race, color, national origin, language proficiency, sex, religion, disability, or sexual preference. The District will neither group by ability nor track by achievement.

Students are taught attitudes and skills to recognize debilitating biases, and to develop a responsibility to protect and advocate a respect of human dignity and the rights of each individual. Instructional material, teaching and curriculum are free of the negative influences of bias. All students have the opportunity to learn their cultural heritage and appreciate its uniqueness as well as that of others. Each student learns to communicate, associate and participate in a diverse community and a pluralistic society.

Multicultural/non-sexist education is achieved through an infusion of a multicultural/non-sexist focus in the curriculum and teaching strategies, increased

options for students and high academic standards and expectations for students. Accurate comprehensive non-biased information about diverse cultures is the basis of Governing Board policies, administrative regulations, curriculum, teaching, instructional materials, staff development, assessment and evaluation, classroom and school climate, human resource practices, counseling and guidance, community involvement and staff recruitment. All staff is held accountable for implementation of multicultural/non-sexist education within their areas of responsibility.

Adopted by Board: November 19, 1991[1]

National Education Association Policies

Student Sexual Orientation

The National Education Associate believes that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, should be afforded equal opportunity within the public education system. The Association further believes that every school district should provide counseling by trained personnel for students who are struggling with their sexual/gender orientation.

Family Life Education

...The Association recognizes that sensitive sex education can be a positive force in promoting physical, mental, and social health and the public school must assume an increasingly important role in providing the instruction....The Association urges its affiliates and members to support appropriately established sex education programs, including information on...diversity of sexual orientation ....To facilitate the realization of human potential, it is the right of every individual to live in an environment of freely available information, knowledge, and wisdom about sexuality.

Nondiscriminatory Personnel Policies/Affirmative Action

...Personnel policies and practices must guarantee that no person be employed, retained, paid, dismissed, suspended, demoted, transferred, or retired because of...sexual orientation....

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[1] Tucson Unified School District, Diversity Appreciation Education, Board Policy 6112 (Tucson, Arizona: Nov. 19, 1991). Handout used in Jones and Jack, "Inclusion" Workshop.

Civil Rights

The NEA...calls upon Americans to eliminate--by statute and practice--barriers of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, handicap, marital status, and economic status that prevent some individuals, adult or juvenile, from exercising rights enjoyed by others, including liberties decreed in common law, the Constitution, and statutes of the United States....

Hate-Motivated Violence

The NEA deplores incidents of hate-motivated physical and verbal attacks against individuals or groups because of...sexual orientation....The Association urges its affiliates, in conjunction with community groups, to create an awareness of hate-motivated, violent activities and to develop programs to oppose them. The Association supports its affiliates in their efforts to bring about clear and consistent law enforcement to protect the civil and human rights of the victims of hate-motivated, violent actions.[2]

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[2] National Education Association, "Affording Equal Opportunity to Gay and Lesbian Students Through Teaching and Counseling," NEA Workshop Training Manual, 1993. Handout used in Jones and Jack, "Inclusion" Workshop.

APPENDIX FOUR

RELEVANT RESOURCES/ORGANIZATIONS[3]

(A Sampling)

Organizations

Queer Educators

Bay Area Network of Gay and Lesbian Educators (BANGLE), 584 Castro St., Suite 173, San Francisco, CA 94114 (415) 285-5078.

Gay and Lesbian School Teachers' Network (GLSTN), c/o ISAM, 222 Forbes Rd., Suite 105, Braintree, MA 02184 (617) 849-3080

Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force of TESOL c/o Martha Clark Cummings, Chair, Monterey Institute of Information Studies (English Studies), 425 Van Buren St., Monterey, CA 93940

Harvard Graduate School of Education Gay/Lesbian Secondary Schools Curriculum Project (Arthur Lipkin). Extensive bibliographies, etc.

INSITE (The Books Project), 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 676-5302 (Chuck Jones). Teacher trainings about including queer literature in the classroom.

Lesbian and Gay Teachers Association of New York City, Box 021052, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0023, (718) 596-1864. Speaker's Bureau.

LesBiGay Special Interest Group of NAFSA, c/o Scott E. King, Director, International Student/Faculty Services, Old Dominion University, 209 Webb Center, Norfolk, VA 23529, (804) 683-3701, fax: (802) 683-5142. Also publish a newsletter.

National Education Association, Gay and Lesbian Caucus and Human and Civil Rights, c/o NEA, 1201 Sixteenth St. NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 822-7700

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[3] Thanks to Chuck Jones, Jan Smith, Lisa Carscadden, Cynthia Nelson and Jim Ward for sharing some of this information with me.

Queer Youth/Students

Friends of Project 10, Inc., 7850 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90046, (213) 651-5200, (818) 441-3382. Support for queer students, publish Project 10 Handbook.

Hetrick-Martin Institute for the Protection of Gay and Lesbian Youth, 401 West St., New York, NY 10014, (212) 633-8920; TTY: (212) 633-8928

Sexual Minority Youth Action League (SMYAL), 333 1/2 Pennsylvania Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20003 (202) 546-5940

General

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), Information Secretariat, c/o Antenne Rose, 81 rue Marche-au-Charbon, 1000 Brussels BELGIUM

International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference, c/o Black Lesbian and Gay Center (BLGC), BM Box 4390, London, WCI 3XX ENGLAND

Lesbian Herstory Archives, Box 1258, New York, NY 10016 (212) 874-7232

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1517 U St. NW, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 332-6483

National Latino(a) Lesbian/Gay Organization (LLEGO), PO Box 44483, Washington, DC 20026 (202) 544-0092

BiNET 584 Castro St., #441, San Francisco, CA 94114. National bisexual network.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), PO Box 27605, Washington, DC 20038-7605 (202) 638-4200. Local chapters in many areas.

Some Queer-Inclusive ESOL Texts

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Interviews were conducted by the author with Respondents #1A and #1B through #12. The first two were interviewed together in person, and the last was interviewed in writing. All of the others were done by telephone. All spoken interviews were tape recorded and roughly transcribed. Material that was directly quoted was then corrected so that it is verbatim.

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